

RICE UNIVERSITY

Feminist Interpretations of the Home and the Practice of Dwelling

by

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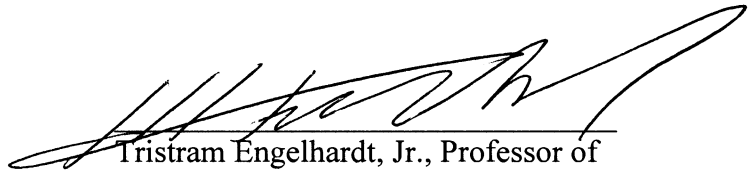
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores a resignification of the home in light of Heidegger's concept of dwelling. I begin by reviewing two opposing interpretations of the social and psychological dimensions of home: the traditional view, which sees the home as a site of comfort, refuge and centeredness, and the feminist view, which interprets the home as a site of objectification, difference and oppression. Seeking to cut through the debate, I develop an account of the home based on Heidegger's description of dwelling, which understands the home to be a manifestation of our dwelling practices. That is, the home reveals our way of being open, provisional, historical and communal. In addition to bringing this account to bear on the prior interpretations, I end the thesis with an argument against postmodern proposals of "homelessness" and explore the relationship between the home as a site of dwelling and our understanding of self.

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INTRODUCTION

Never merely a physical structure or a geographical location, the home occupies a complex social and psychological place in our everyday life. Despite, or precisely because of, the central place the home holds in our discourse on culture, politics and identity, the home has received very little philosophical attention as anything other than a private setting of family affairs and/or personal freedoms. When the home has been studied as a place of unique social-political and ethical significance, the interpretations have often come from feminists and post-colonialist thinkers who urge us to reconsider the ways in which the home is glorified in our everyday discourse as a place of warmth and comfort, belongingness and security. The home, these interpretations argue, is often an oppressive force, one which covers over and neglects the subjectivity of woman, or the “other,” in order to provide a ideal place for man, or the subject. In this thesis, I aim to cut through these opposing interpretations of the home provided by its traditional and feminist interpreters by attempting to understand it in light of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling. The home, I shall argue, is neither simply a place of peace and security, nor is it solely representative of oppression and violence, but it is a complex structure which has the power to reveal how we, as the ones who “dwell,” are open, provisional, historical and communal.

It may be helpful to first consider why the home and its significance has drawn the attention of feminist theorists and activists when it has received so little attention elsewhere. Motivated first by Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s and by Betty Friedan in the 1960s, the home has long been a polarizing force in the women’s movement, and the

reasons why it has been taken up as a “feminist issue,” or as something which is in need of closer examination and revaluation based on the questioning of deeply imbedded gender roles, are multiple. One of the most widespread reasons in second-wave feminism for bringing attention to the home is to reveal the invisible labor of women in the household. Women, within the gendered division of labor, have been, and continue to be largely responsible for child-rearing and housework, including the daily chores of cooking and cleaning.¹ While such work may be tedious and undesirable in itself, as Beauvoir argues, the reason it is considered “invisible” and therefore of ethical concern to the majority of feminists is because such work in the home is often unacknowledged, unpaid, and severely affects women’s ability to achieve the social, economic and political status afforded to their male partners in the public domain. Thus the organization of the home and household labor creates a situation in which women are economically and socially dependent upon their male counterparts. With such an understanding in mind, second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s often viewed an escape from the home and domestic life as requisite for empowerment and social-economic independence.

Another reason that the home has been the subject of feminist criticism and activism is because of the violence against women that often takes place there. For a place which is traditionally considered safe, comfortable and refuge-like, the home is all too often the setting of battery and sexual assault against women. In fact, it is often noted

¹ For a quick, interesting case read on this continuing gender disparity, see Londa Shiebinger and Shannon Gilmartin’s article “Housework is an Academic Issue” in *Academe* (January-February 2010): 39-44. This study, based on data collected on academic couples at top research universities in 2006–07, shows that despite women’s considerable gains in science in recent decades, female scientists do nearly twice as much housework as their male counterparts.

that such an idealization of the home plays into the violence against women that takes place there: firstly because such an understanding of home as a safe, private place makes domestic violence difficult to perceive, and secondly because women, in their earnest desire to produce this idealized setting of tranquility, often hold themselves responsible for failing to create such a home, and therefore, feel that they are to blame for the violence against them.² Thus, part of the feminist politics of home is a revelation of domestic violence in order to challenge the view of the home as an eternally safe and loving setting, and to show that what goes on in the home is often of public, political interest.

Wishing to escape the home of invisible labor and domestic violence, many women sought to create a “new home” in feminist politics. In particular, in second-wave feminism when women sought to show that the “personal is political,” activism and “consciousness-raising” often entailed women sharing their tales of discrimination and inequality in their domestic lives with their “sisters” or new “families” of feminist activists. But in their conceptualization of such a home in politics, borrowing from the traditional understanding of home as comfortable, safe and heterogeneous, many were surprised to find conflict in the feminist movement when women of color and of differing socio-economic backgrounds felt marginalized and often criticized the impossibility and fallacy of mainstream feminist (read: white, upper-middle class) attempts to speak for all women. The “home” in feminism then came to represent much more than the four walls in which one cleans or raises children, pleases or displeases men; it took on a symbolic

² Joshua Price. “The Apotheosis of Home and the Maintenance of Spaces of Violence.” in *Hypatia*, 17:4 (2002): 39-70.

importance as a way of thinking that encourages sameness, theoretical safety and the longing for comfort, even in political, intercultural settings which are bound to be divisive. With this new understanding of the necessity to embrace women and viewpoints from outside one's cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic "homes," many feminist theorists came to believe that the "home" as an affirmative ideology or set of positive values was irredeemable.

Much is owed to feminist theorists and activists for bringing to our attention to the manner in which the home is a thoroughly inter-subjective endeavor, and thus a place of social, political, and economic interests and vulnerabilities. However, while the feminist critiques significantly disrupt and complicate the notion that home is to be thought of as a safe, comfortable place of belonging and tranquility, such arguments rarely offer more than cursory recommendations of how we are to reconcile these negative revelations of the home with our traditional view of the it, a view which still strongly resonates with many, feminists and non-feminists alike. In other words, how are we to navigate between the experience of home as a place of belonging, comfort and safety with the knowledge that it often acts as a setting of oppression, objectification and violence? Is there a way to salvage a sense of home which reflects both experiences as well as the ongoing tensions between them?

In what follows, I will present Heidegger's concept of dwelling as a way of thinking which offers a middle way. In doing so, I do not wish to argue that understanding the home as practice of dwelling retrieves its traditional, positive values, nor do I mean to assert that the home conceived in this way will necessarily prevent the

objectification or violence which takes place there. What I do wish to show is how the home designates the way in which humans dwell, a practice which is itself a product of history and intersubjectivity, and which therefore necessitates a kind of receptivity, vulnerability, and an understanding that how we live and what we do is essentially interpretive. In other words, I seek to show how the home is a reflection of our practice of dwelling as Heidegger describes it, and as such, we are able to see in the home (and in the debates surrounding it) the various dimensions that constitute our way of being. The understanding that dwelling is our way of being calls us to practice mindfulness and reticence in our interactions with others and with regard to how we understand our own positionality in a historical-communal setting. I believe such an understanding of the home as a dwelling practice, while not “curing” the difficulties that take place there, has the capacity to open us up to the critical practices of the home in a valuable, realistic and less oppressive manner than found in either the traditional or the feminist conceptions.

In Chapter One, I review what I have been calling the “traditional view” of the home and contrast it with the “feminist critiques.” The feminist critiques showcase the more prominent, philosophical views of home put forth by Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and several more contemporary feminist theorists. While each critique has a different motivation and explanation for why the home is a force of oppression, I will argue that all appear to take the traditional view of home at face value. With such an understanding of home in mind, these critiques call for a rejection of home as a locus of positive values and promote instead the idea of displacement or a sort of “homelessness” as a more honest and ethical orientation.

In Chapter Two, I carry out an exegesis of Martin Heidegger's concept of dwelling. After explicating his thinking on building and dwelling, I address Iris Marion Young's critique of Heideggerian dwelling as "male-biased," and argue that her interpretation of dwelling, while a step in the right direction, is ultimately incomplete. I finish the chapter by examining the larger role of dwelling in Heideggerian thought and thus prepare the way for us to think through how the home qualifies as a site which reveals our dwelling in its various modalities and forms.

In the third chapter, I use the foregoing analysis of dwelling to establish the qualities of what I call the "practice" of dwelling. In other words, what kind of characteristics of home would have to be there in order for us to understand it as a place in which we enact dwelling and reveal ourselves in our dwelling? After establishing four characteristics, openness, provisionality, historicity and communality, I use them to describe the home as a physical and social setting. By juxtaposing this understanding of the home with the feminist critiques in the first chapter, I show how such a conception of home as a manifestation of our dwelling takes these critiques seriously while, at the same time, does not simply advocate an escape from domesticity or a rejection of the home as a unique place and meaningful construction of the self.

Finally, in the forth chapter, I return to the traditional understanding of home, characterized as stable, comfortable, and intimately tied with our experience of self, to attempt a partial reconciliation of these notions with our new understanding. In doing so, I reveal further why the recommendation of "homelessness" in the feminist and postmodernist critiques are ill-conceived and unnecessary. While the home of dwelling

is by no means the dream of a fully-coherent identity or a refuge from the world, it remains the main guiding force of one's life and thus a critical practice of selfhood.

CHAPTER 1: Safe Haven or Prison? Concepts of Home in the 20th Century

In this chapter, we will explore the various constructions of “home” in scholarly writings in the 20th century. While such characterizations will come from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, I would like to focus in particular on the ways in which “home” carries multivalent, often contradictory, meanings for feminist philosophers and activists. We will begin by reviewing briefly the more orthodox connotations of home as an idealized, sacred place of safety and renewal, and then explore conceptualizations, such as those offered by Beauvoir, Irigaray and contemporary feminist theorists, which conflict with this traditional understanding. In particular, this chapter will focus on how the idea of home is often connected with one’s understanding of “self” and with feelings of liberation or confinement. While the home is traditionally thought of as a safe, comfortable place, where one can be herself, for many, the home signifies precisely the opposite: domination, oppression or the impossibility of ever having or showing a true self. As we come to understand and compare feminist thinking on the concept of home, it will become apparent how “home” is a multidimensional concept with a particular set of meanings for feminist thinkers.

1) “Home: The Landscape of the Heart”¹

In their extensive review of the significance and meaning of home, Porteous and Smith greatly emphasize the centrality of the home in providing nourishment and

¹ J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E Smith, *Domicide: the Global Destruction of Home* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001). 24.

fulfillment to one's personal and emotional life, as indicated by the title of their chapter (and of this section). Homes are defined as "places that are quiet refuges from the outside world; places in which we can truly be ourselves and display and nurture our being; places in which, above all, we may experience centeredness, identity, and security."² While it may be argued that they promote such a positive characterization in the service of their wider goal, which is to reveal the devastation and sense of loss accompanying the "global destruction of the home," or the demolition of houses and living areas for the sake of development projects (both publicly and privately funded), one can easily find such connotations of the home in poetry, literature, politics and popular culture. Such common sayings as "make yourself at home" or "home is where the heart is" indicate the home as a place where one meant to be both physically and emotionally at ease. To make oneself at home means to be comfortable, to be oneself in the sense that one displays his or her "true" personality, to be free and open with his or her thoughts and opinions. Gaston Bachelard, in his time-honored *The Poetics of Space*, a treatise on our experience of intimate spaces describes his house and home thus:

If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace...In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing.³

While Bachelard is describing a physical space and edifice, many of us think exclusively of this space, the house, when we think of the "home." The house and home are to be places, whether physically or psychologically, of tranquility and refuge, a place where we

² Ibid., 3

³ Gaston Bachelard, *The poetics of space*. (New York: Orion Press, 1964): 6

can think peacefully, undisturbed by contingencies and chaos of the world outside. The home is a protective force; it is thought to safeguard the self from external demands. As a “refuge from the outside,” the home is contrasted with the public sphere, a place where social norms demand a certain kind of ethical engagement, or at least politeness and political-correctness. The home is a place of freedom in the liberal sense in that, when there, one is thought to be free from others’ expectations and from the scrutiny and surveillance that exists “outside.”

When we think of the home as “where the heart is” one thinks of a place of rootedness, centeredness, and fulfillment. Such thoughts of home usually go back to the first, childhood home, where, in the best case scenario, one’s bodily and emotional needs were met by loving parents and family members. One felt free, in the childhood home, to grow and to learn, thus to develop a sense of self intimately tied to family and cultural tradition. This home is where we belonged (as opposed to the world outside where we must continually seek a feeling of belonging; “you can never go home again”). Such feelings can easily be extended to one’s “hometown,” or even “homeland,” where one feels a sense of ease and belonging in comparison to the feeling of foreignness and inadequacy in another place and time. The home, then, is easily coupled with our memories of the past, and thus a source of nostalgia and longing for a safety and acceptance. For Bachelard, there is a fundamental difference between our memories of home and of the outside world; home is distinct memory and concept which provides protection and foundation for our lives, thus serving as one of the “greatest powers of

integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind.”⁴ One gains power and freedom from the thought of home because it is where one finds true grounding in the world. One’s sense of self is protected and stabilized in the home, and with such a foundation and established identity, one becomes free to wander and “dream,” or orient herself in future directions, towards external projects and engagements when such opportunities arise.

Whether it be the memory of our childhood home or the one we seek to create for ourselves in adulthood, the home is typically viewed as a place of warmth and comfort, a retreat from the outside world in which we can relax and take down the walls which guard our “true” selves. The home is thought of as “our corner of the world,” a place which is truly ours and thus symbolic of a center and foundation of individuation and identity, a liberating power which frees one from scrutiny while inside, and makes one courageous enough to go outside.

2) Simone de Beauvoir and the Immanent Woman of the House

If such experiences of the home resonate with us, Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of the home-place in her groundbreaking work, *The Second Sex*, may give us pause, for there is no doubt for her that the traditional home of the heteronormative family is a place of confinement and domination. In her explicit description of the day-to-day drudgery of housework and the lack of freedom of movement that the “everywoman” experiences,

⁴ Bachelard, *Poetics*, 29

Beauvoir is credited with revealing to generations of feminists that woman's oppression begins in the home.

To Beauvoir, the home symbolizes torturous, monotonous labor and a lack of freedom to pursue and affirm one's individuality. "Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present."⁵ Unlike activities such as writing or inventing, housework is not productive; it has no enduring ends or outcomes, only all-too-temporary pauses until the "battle against dust and dirt" must begin again.⁶ For Beauvoir, this means that women are held captive to the repetitive work typical to the maintenance of life and thus have no means or freedom to work out their own identity. In other words, "Woman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home—that is to say, to immanence."⁷

To understand why Beauvoir sees housework and the realm of the home as oppressive to women, we must understand Beauvoir's analysis of transcendence and immanence. Through the recovery a Hegelian account of subjectivity, Beauvoir defines oppression as relegation to the sphere of immanence, as opposed the possibility of achieving transcendence. In *The Second Sex*, this distinction is made manifest in a typology of transcendent and immanent activities. Transcendent activities are "freely chosen projects" which enable humans to express themselves as individuals, increase liberties for themselves and others, and/or create something lasting which contributes to

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Random House, 1952) 470

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 449

humanity.⁸ Thus, transcendence is future-oriented, in which human life and one's present existence expands "into an indefinitely open future."⁹ Immanence, on the other hand, is completely characterized by a maintenance, or perpetuation, of the present and therefore cannot hope to produce anything lasting. Activities of immanence include activities such as bathing, cleaning, cooking, and presumably watching trash television or mindlessly surfing the web (although, for obvious reasons, Beauvoir does not mention the latter two). Beauvoir characterizes immanent activities as repetitive and dull, but, most essentially, as futile, uncreative tasks in which time and energy is merely consumed.

Beauvoir's distinction between immanent and transcendent activities bears a close resemblance to Arendt's understanding of the difference between labor and work, activities which also seem to break down along similar spatial (and social) boundaries. The activity of laboring, for Arendt, can be separated from working by making reference both to the parts of the body used in such processes and the places in which such activities happen. Labor is "the labor of our body," an activity in which one must serve the needs for the maintenance of life, or bodily survival.¹⁰ As activities of maintenance, such laboring is routine or circular, and does not lead to durable products or ends. Labor produces things whose "consumption barely survives the act of their production, and therefore, does not produce things which "stay in the world long enough to become a part of it."¹¹ Work, conversely, does achieve worldly permanence through the production of objects and ideologies, which are beneficial to humans. The worker, in Arendt's

⁸ Ibid., 28-29, See also *The Ethics of Ambiguity*; (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949) 81-3.

⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 29

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998). 80

¹¹ Ibid., 96, 118

characterization, “uses his hands” to “fabricate[] the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice.”¹² Such things possess value in their usefulness (or simply, in modernity, as property), and allow for the stabilization of human life through the regulation or institutionalization of their use. In this way, the craftsman not only creates durable objects, but also sets into place abstract systems which endure over time. Like Beauvoir’s notion of transcendence, such work allows for creative and lasting artifacts of humanity.

But how does the distinction between immanence and transcendence, labor and work, translate into oppression for women? The ethical problem arises when one relegates the other to immanent realm in order to carry out his own transcendent acts, or constructive projects. And for Beauvoir, the other is woman: “the situation of woman is that she...nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other.”¹³ To be the other means to be objectified and overshadowed by the “real” self or subject whose projects are found to be more important, worthy or genuine. Here we can see that Beauvoir might interpret the feelings and experiences we traditionally associate with the home to be valid, but only insofar as they are representative only of man’s experience, since he is the only subject who feels comfortable and free in and through the home, feelings which are built upon the enforced immanent state of woman.

In the home, constructed around the heteronormative marriage, woman remains in immanence, busying herself with the mechanical tasks necessary to maintain life, so that

¹² Ibid., 136

¹³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 29

man may explore opportunities for transcendence (largely outside of the home, but not necessarily so). Man, Beauvoir tells us, “gets himself a home, he settles down, and has an anchorage in the world.”¹⁴ The woman of the house, however, serves quite a different purpose in the homeplace: the wife “restores his soul” and “looks after his children and guards the things of the past that she has amassed.”¹⁵ The home, for man, serves as “an anchorage” or the foundation on which his meaningful and productive projects are based.¹⁶ But, importantly, while he has his “hearth and home,” man is “free to escape therefrom” to the activities and pleasures not provided at or by the home.¹⁷ Woman, on the other hand, simply *as* woman, is to forget her own projects and possibilities for self-expression and instead provide sustenance and stability for man through largely repetitive, non-productive tasks.

Arendt, while not explicitly engaged in the project of women’s liberation, makes a similar connection between the labor, the private or domestic space, and oppression. “To labor,” she notes, “means to be enslaved by necessity,” or the dictates of nature.¹⁸ Laboring is equated with humans’ animalistic nature, bound as it is to bodily functions and needs, and therefore, out of contempt for such tasks, the head of the household in ancient Greece left laborious acts to household slaves.¹⁹ In the context of a strict, ancient Greek boundary between public and private life, Arendt describes labor as consigned exclusively to the private realm. The home, then, would only be a place of freedom and

¹⁴ Ibid., 449

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ Ibid., 473

¹⁷ Ibid., 475

¹⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 83

¹⁹ Ibid., 84

empowerment (from the body and labor; for politics and more meaningful activities) for certain groups, namely males of a certain class and rank. Similarly to Beauvoir, Arendt found that since all “men were dominated by the necessities of life, they could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force.”²⁰ It is important to note, particularly if we are to find these descriptions of daily life in ancient Greece significant to our modern situation, that this force is not necessarily violent, in that it entails threats to bodily integrity (though it may and all too often does). Rather, it is crucially built into hegemonic understandings of the “natural” place of women and persons of lower class in society (both historically and at present). In other words, “force” can take place through ideology and other normative practices which delineate which bodies are allowed to become full subjects (who work, create, and contribute to humanity) and which are bound to the state of the other, the object, the animal or the slave.

It is important to note, particularly in the US context, which has debatably seen a return to traditionalism with regard to home and family, that Beauvoir does not argue that women are necessarily pessimistic or disparaging of their required tasks in the home. Rather, she shows that women take great pride in providing for their family and in decorating the home: “woman is all for giving her ‘interior’ the meaning and value that the true house and home once had.”²¹ Arguing that the modern home has lost some of its former sanctity, Beauvoir acknowledges that the work that goes into “home-making” is one that many women eagerly and happily undertake. But this too may be symbolic of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 468

their oppression: where “man is but mildly interested in his immediate surroundings because he can find self-expression in projects...woman is confined within the conjugal sphere; it is for her to change that prison into a realm.”²² Beauvoir seems to attribute a kind of fatalism to the housewife; she throws herself into her tasks at home because, without similar access to outside engagements and political action as man, housework and decorating projects are the only means through which she can display her talents and taste. The home is the only place where she can “show” herself as a unique individual. The home becomes “the centre of the world,” the woman’s only reality where she can find sources of justification and activities to fill her existence, and so she sets herself to the task of making it as perfect as possible.²³

While Beauvoir remains doubtful that non-domestic, gainful employment can entirely secure woman’s liberation,²⁴ her description of the home, the fundamental state of immanence associated with household labor, certainly implies the belief that woman’s emancipation involves at least a partial freedom from the nonproductive tasks of home, and engagement in the transcendent, meaning-making work of politics, society and other intellectual endeavors. The home, then, for woman, is not to be equated with comfort, refuge and freedom to be oneself, but rather, with confinement, endless labor, and the powerlessness one has to ever show one’s individuality.

²² Ibid., 469

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 689-91

3) Woman as Home in Luce Irigaray

While Irigaray is similarly concerned with describing woman's conceptual "place" and relation to man as the other, she goes further than Beauvoir in her characterization of the relationship between woman's oppression and home.²⁵ Where Beauvoir found that woman is unable to achieve transcendence because she is relegated to the immanent realm of the home and household, Irigaray finds that woman lacks the ability to become who she is because, as the "maternal-feminine," she serves as the home. That is, metaphorically, woman *is* home to man.

Using psychoanalysis as her theoretical framework, Irigaray asserts that woman, as the mother, "represents place for man."²⁶ That is, the mother as a womb is the first home. The longing for our childhood home, that we touched upon in our review of traditional meanings of the home, is interpreted by Irigaray as a constant longing for the mother, the "envelope, a container, the starting point from which man limits his things."²⁷ The warmth and security of the womb, the "memory of [the] first and ultimate dwelling place" Irigaray contends, is not reconciled in man, and so, it is sought out in women, as she finds manifest in the desire for sexual intercourse and marriage. Rather than

²⁵ As many commentators have noted, there are great differences between Beauvoir and Irigaray's concept of woman as other, particularly with regard to how possible, or indeed desirable, it would be for woman to achieve transcendence, read by Irigaray as "equality," with man. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will emphasize their differences only with regard to the meaning of home as it appears in their work. For more direct comparison between Irigaray and Beauvoir, see Karen Green, "The Other as Another Other," *Hypatia* 17, no. 4 (2002): 1-15 and Luce Irigaray and Noah Guynn, "The Question of the Other," *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995): 7-19.

²⁶ I will use the nouns "man" and "woman" rather than "male" and "female" in the attempt to differentiate between what I believe to be differences with regard to gender rather than biological sex (with the risk of essentializing the distinction between sex and gender). The issue of essentialism between the sexes (strategic or otherwise) is quite complex in Irigaray and would require a discussion beyond the limits of this thesis. See note 32 and Diana J. Fuss's "'Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence" in *Hypatia*, 3:3, Winter 1989.

²⁷ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 10

overcoming this nostalgia for the first home, man “arrests his growth and repeats, endlessly, searching...he surrounds himself with envelopes, containers, “houses”...his nostalgia for a first and last dwelling prevents him from meeting and living with the other.”²⁸ In other words, the longing for the “original” wholeness or unity with the mother drives man to seek out this feeling or quality in all that surrounds him. In an effort to fulfill this longing, man’s love moves teleologically, it “aims for a target outside” and “to inhabit”; “man is forever searching for, building, creating homes for himself everywhere: caves, huts, women, cities, language, concepts, theories, and so on.”²⁹ Since the maternal womb and the accompanying feeling of completeness and security can never be reclaimed, man, Irigaray would say, attempts to create objects, systems, and concepts which reflect his subjectivity as complete and thus ease his nostalgia and desire to return “home.”

But such nostalgia comes at the expense of the other. Woman’s oppression as a subject occurs because man’s imposition, the treatment of her as an object, or container through which he limits or demarcates his life, deprives her of her own place: “she is or ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it.”³⁰ She is “used [] as construction material, but (therefore?) it is not available to her.”³¹ Though Irigaray’s method is more abstract, we can see the similarities to Beauvoir: woman is disallowed the comforts and protections of home because it is up to her to make man feel at ease and at home. His feeling of security and liberation in the homeplace is dependent

²⁸ Ibid., 142

²⁹ Ibid., 141

³⁰ Ibid., 10

³¹ Ibid., 107 (Irigaray’s parentheses; for clarity: the “it” in the quotations above refers to “place,” in this case, woman’s body and the overall sphere of what Irigaray believes should be woman’s *own*)

upon her confinement and service. The tangible place of the home that Beauvoir and Arendt describe is characterized by Irigaray as one “endless construction of a number of substitutes for his prenatal home.”³² While woman too has the experience of nostalgia and longing for the mother, she is cut off from her search, or reconciliation, as she is quickly displaced by man’s desires, and never has the opportunity to find a place for herself.³³ While it may seem as though man provides for woman by giving her shelter in the material home, Irigaray does not accept this as a real exchange since “he [] shuts her up in it, places limits on her...he contains or envelops her with walls while enveloping himself and his things with her flesh.”³⁴ The material conditions of the home that make it a place of comfort and security for man are afforded through the body (labor) of woman, and at the expense of her subjectivity and the possibility of finding a “home” of her own. The home, rather, is a place of “internal exile,” where woman is doomed to a kind of homelessness, “placelessness,” that is, “unless she is able, in some other way, to take on the envelope of her ‘own’ desire, the garb of her ‘own’ jouissance, of her ‘own’ love.”³⁵

³² Ibid., 11

³³ Whether or not the woman too has longings for the prenatal home is a complex question in psychoanalytic thought (of Freud, of Lacan, of Irigaray, etc.). In Freudian theory, both male and female are born bisexual, and develop a desire for the mother or female figure, based on the physical closeness of the female figure in childcare, such as breastfeeding. Where the male child is encouraged to continue desiring the female figure (through the promise of his own “mother” or female later in life), the female child is discouraged (by being made to feel physically inadequate, i.e., she lacks the penis that the female desires). For Lacan, it is the signification of the penis, the phallus, which is more critical than the actual penis. Irigaray follows Lacan in her focus on the phallus. While it is unclear to me to what extent Irigaray disagrees with the traditional thesis, that desire is originally undifferentiated in the male and female, it is clear that Irigaray is criticizing the “permission” given to man by phallogocentric society to pursue his desire for the mother, and so, his nostalgia for the womb, where woman is encouraged to forgo her longings and desire for place in order to make her more attractive and able to fulfill man’s desires. Therefore, under my interpretation, the longing for the womb and for a safe home where all needs are met, is not *essentially* gendered. Both male and female would experience a different relation to the womb and to their own subjectivity if the power relations between them were shift toward a more equal exchange.

³⁴ Irigaray, *Ethics*, 11

³⁵ Ibid., 65

To Irigaray, the tradition of home represents the forgotten subjectivity of woman, a subjectivity which, if not crushed by man's desires, would lead to new ways of loving, exchanging, socializing, speaking, and thinking.

Ultimately, Irigaray explains, both males and females suffer from this inability on man's part to reconcile the loss of the first home, a reconciliation which would allow him to find in himself a "home-subject," and in woman, a subjectivity which demands ethical treatment and the opportunity to find a place of her own. This is so because the wholeness that man seeks in woman is illusory, built simply on the objectification and destruction of the other rather than in any true communion of the sexes, and as such, it elides the possibility of each, man and woman, creating a "mutual enveloping" or dialectical relationship where "the one and the other move around within a whole."³⁶ This would be accomplished, presumably, by a philosophy of the body or of the flesh. Irigaray hints that man must realize that he has a body: "in all his creations, in all his works, man always seems to neglect thinking of himself as flesh, as one who has received his body as that primary home."³⁷ While this "home" would be quite different from the home of the mother, one associated with wholeness and security, it would, Irigaray supposes, allow both man and woman to "build an identity, a language, a body of work" and create the possibility of an authentic meeting place for the two.³⁸ Thus, unlike Beauvoir, Irigaray does not believe that the solution lies in the equal opportunity for both men and women to achieve transcendence, as she sees such endeavors as illusory and founded upon the very traits in man that create women's oppression, but advocates the

³⁶ Ibid., 54

³⁷ Ibid., 127-8

³⁸ Ibid., 142

return of both to the material, the animal body, or in Beauvoir's language, to a recognition of value in the realm of immanence.

4) Contemporary Voices

While both popular and scholarly opinion affirms the rejection of the home and its traditional values as a central precept of feminism, particularly second-wave feminism of the 1970s-1980s, feminists continue to disagree as to why such a rejection is, if at all, needed.³⁹ While many put forth arguments similar to Beauvoir's about the drudgery and lack of opportunities for political and social engagement presented by the duties of the household, others find that the traditional values of the home are to be rejected conceptually, in a move similar to Irigaray's, on the basis of their hollowness and tendency to promote acts of domination and zealotry. In this section, we will consider the writings of feminist scholars and activists who, unlike Beauvoir, Arendt and Irigaray, have a particular interest in interrogating the concept of home, a study which, for many, entails a denial of it as a locus of positive value.⁴⁰

The idea that the concept of home was in need of explicit analysis appears to have arisen within the discussion of the practice of feminist politics itself. In her essay, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," activist Bernice Johnson Reagon urges women

³⁹ Shelley Mallett, "Understanding Home: a Critical Review of the Literature," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004): 75. It should be understood that this "rejection of home" is not always, or even typically, a wholesale rejection, but rather as a critique of the home as traditionally understood as a haven. The varied opinions of this critique range from liberal feminists who simply advocate better jobs for women outside the home, to socialist feminists who demand wages for housework or communal, free childcare, to radical feminists who reject the marriage and family structure entirely.

⁴⁰ Whereas Beauvoir and Irigaray's work are engaged in a larger critique of woman's relation to man, the works in this section focus in particular on the concept of home and its symbolic force. Hannah Arendt's work, while also centered on the complexities of political life and power, is not typically seen as engaged with feminist theory at all.

not to confuse politics with the home: “it ain’t home no more. It is not a womb no more. And you can’t feel comfortable no more.”⁴¹ Worried that women are, as Irigaray describes men, nostalgic for a place of belonging and fulfillment, Reagon warns that women should not turn to feminist politics in search of refuge, because women qua women do not share a common experience (“The women’s movement has perpetuated a myth that there is some common experience that comes just cause you’re women”), and such differences within the group entails struggle and compromise, not nourishment (“you don’t get fed in a coalition”).⁴² Women, Reagon argues, must be prepared for “conflict” and “danger,” because coalition means working with people who are not like us, who are not from our “home.”

Using the understanding of home and “not home” (coalition) that Reagon proposes as a reference point, Bonnie Honig, in her essay “Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home,” explores the way in which the idea of home is simultaneously motivated as place of withdrawal from political life and conflict, and as a dream of the unified coherent subject or group (whether it be a person, political party, nation, or race). For Honig, both of these motivations are ill-founded both theoretically and ethically.

She begins by considering Bernard Williams’ notion that dilemmas are central to moral theorizing since “human values are plural, incommensurable, and therefore, bound to conflict in any social order.”⁴³ Such a conception is meant as a celebration of the

⁴¹ Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century” in *Home girls : a Black feminist anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table--Women of Color Press, 1983). 358-9

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Bonnie Honig, “Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home,” *Social Research* 61, no. 3 (1994): 570-1

“liberal consciousness,” and a rejection of the systematic approaches of Kantianism and utilitarianism which deny moral dilemmas by developing formulas designed to adduce the right answers when two “oughts” are in conflict. While the latter projects are motivated by the longing for closure, to be done with a dilemma through the certainty of having made the right choice, the competing values and moral obligations within the individual, not to mention one’s very personal involvement in such choices and outcomes, rarely makes closure an option.

While accepting Williams’ drive to create a “dilemmatic” moral theory, Honig objects to Williams’ distinction between “ordinary” dilemmas and “extraordinary dilemmas” on the basis that such a distinction ignores the ways in which ordinary dilemmas, at the discursive and institutional level, are similarly unruly, contingent, and “radically undecidable.” She questions Williams’ examples of the ordinary dilemma, one in which a chemist must decide whether to stay at home, jobless, or work at a company which produces biochemical weapons, and of the extraordinary dilemma, in which an English traveler in South America must decide whether or not to execute one native in order to save the others. While Williams finds the first dilemma easier to resolve (the chemist should turn down the job for the sake of his personal integrity), Honig argues that Williams, by staging one conflict at “home” and the other “elsewhere,” produces a dichotomy which enables one agent to feel grounded in his integrity and identity in the safety of home, ignoring how his privilege and power to make such a decision is created through a variety of modern, colonial discourses which place violence and “radical undecidability” elsewhere.

In such cases, home can be seen as a withdrawal, a refusal to become involved in the institutional practices and discourses which have already inscribed us in a particular historical-social-political field. We are always already in a social position which is caught up in institutional and colonial discourses and practices of power from which we cannot easily escape. For Honig, and other post-colonialist and feminist thinkers like her, retreat is not only ignorant or violent, but impossible. Home, as a “safe place” where one’s identity is protected from real difference and conflict, is illusory and ultimately represents the refusal to exist in a “dilemmatic space” which accepts that one’s agency is “constituted by and daily mired in dilemmatic choices and negotiations.”⁴⁴ Thus we see that the characterizations of home as withdrawal and as a dream of a unitary subject are closely intertwined. We withdraw or retreat to the home in an effort to avoid political and social engagement with those who are different from us, or with histories which we find disagreeable and from which we wish to separate ourselves or escape.

Moreover, the longing for this place of safety and retreat, for a unified self which is not underwritten by historical and social discourses outside of its control, Honig believes, creates a dangerous situation for those outside of this homeplace when political and economic action does take place:

The dream of home is dangerous, particularly in post colonial settings, because it animates and exacerbates the inability of constituted subjects—or nations—to accept their own internal divisions, and it engenders zealotry, the will to bring the dream of unitariness or home into being. It leads the subject to project its internal differences onto external Others and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 568

then to rage against them for standing in the way of its dream—both at home and elsewhere.⁴⁵

In our desire for unity, of home, nation or self, there is the great possibility that we may not only deny our own internal differences, but also the rights or subjectivities of others who do not seem to belong or fit in our understanding of home.

Similar complaints about the concept of home are put forth by Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty in their analysis of Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart."⁴⁶ In her essay, Pratt, a white American born in the South, explores the places and buildings she considered home, juxtaposing her childhood and young adult memories with the histories of people of different races, religions and ethnicities than her, who also lived in her community and suffered from exploitation and discrimination in order that she, as a member of a privileged race and class, could feel safe and at home. Such a re-evaluation of her childhood, and of the places that she felt were most firmly tied to her identity causes Pratt to rethink her former understanding of herself and what differences she had to cover over in order to feel at home as a unified subject. In doing so, in becoming aware of the exclusions and denials on which this self was predicated, Pratt opts for a kind of homelessness, a refusal of safe hiding places. As Martin and Mohanty describe it, "'Being home' refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 585

⁴⁶ Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" in, *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) and Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1988).

oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself.”⁴⁷ To realize that one’s childhood home or source of centeredness and wholeness is an illusion, a place of dreams built through the domination of others, Pratt supposes, is to accept that “there is no linear progression...to her own identity or self,” or, in other words, there “is no new place, no new home.”⁴⁸

Pratt’s situation—one of homelessness or lost self-identity—seems to be the recommendation of these thinkers. Since whatever feeling of coherence or identity that one has from feeling ‘at home’ tends to be based on the prohibition of difference or the displacement of others, it seems that the only ethical route would be to reject this ideal of home. Teresa de Lauretis, commenting on Martin and Mohanty, advocates just this: “the shift [from home to homelessness] entails, in my opinion, a displacement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is “home”—physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically—for another place that is unknown and risky...”⁴⁹ Like Irigaray, these thinkers suggest that the concept of home—rather, the longing for home—creates a displacement of the Other, a displacement that, under a new ideology, would be extended to everyone. While Irigaray focuses particularly on the woman as the Other, such thinkers extend their analysis to those of other races and classes than the subject’s own.

Is there no place that provides the comfort, security, and sense of identity like home does? Or is it, rather, that there is *no* place like “home”? It is important to note

⁴⁷ Martin & Mohanty, “Feminist Politics,” 196

⁴⁸ Ibid., 198, 201

⁴⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness,” *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990): 138

that while the majority of the feminist thinkers I have described do reject the concept of home as a positive set of values, they nevertheless take home to be representative of the same values that the traditional commentators outlined: as representing security, warmth, protection, retreat, centeredness, identity, etc. In other words, the concept of home presented in the orthodox or traditional understanding has not faced significant challenges: while Beauvoir finds the home to be a place of torture and oppression for women, she sees it as an “anchorage” for man; for Irigaray, it is the longing for the safety and warmth of the maternal womb, and for the contemporary thinkers, it is a place of political retreat and representative of the (dream of the) unified subject. Is it possible to resignify the “home” such that these critiques of it become apparent in its very conceptualization? In the following chapter, we will turn to Martin Heidegger’s concept of dwelling in order to clear the path for such a project.

CHAPTER 2: Heideggerian Dwelling: An Exegesis, a Critique, and a Defense

In her essay, “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme,” Iris Marion Young briefly considers Martin Heidegger’s concept of dwelling in the attempt to elucidate the notions of subjectivity and identity that appear in feminist critiques and appraisals of the home.¹ A central component of her argument is the claim that Heidegger devalues the preservative practices of dwelling in favor of constructive practices. She claims this is male-bias and proceeds to argue that one way in which we can recover positive values of the home, which is under attack by such feminists as those mentioned in the first chapter, is to reevaluate and uphold (feminine) preservative practices. My main task in this chapter will be to follow Young’s footsteps by going back to Heidegger’s text, “Building Dwelling Thinking” (“Bauen Wohnen Denken”) in order to closely consider the question Heidegger first poses in this text: “What is dwelling?” After a close reading, which pays special attention to the connection between dwelling, building, preserving and constructing, I will assess Young’s criticism of Heidegger and her own plans for the concept of preservation. I argue that Young’s criticism is confused and limited, and that, while her utilization of the concept of preservation is fruitful for addressing some of the feminist concerns about the home, she underestimates the power that the concept of dwelling has to address the larger feminist and post-colonialist critiques. Through the engagement with both Heidegger and Young, I will propose that we look to Heidegger’s wider project in order to reveal the alternate

¹ Iris Marion Young “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme.” *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*. Ed. by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia J. Huntington. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001)

understandings of “home,” particularly those which reveal it as existing within the framework and practice of “dwelling.”

1) “Building Dwelling Thinking”

While Heidegger begins his essay with the question “What is dwelling?,” he does not attempt to answer it directly, but rather lets his thinking guide him and his readers slowly through the common and linguistic understandings of “building.” He begins with two qualifications: “we attain to dwelling” through building, but building, as an activity and as an edifice in which humans live or work, is not the same as the practice of dwelling.² In other words, the building where we dwell, if it be a house or “single-family home,” does not simply imply that dwelling takes place. Moreover, while the relationship between building and dwelling is not yet understood, Heidegger quickly dismisses the notion that dwelling is always and in every case tied to the places where we feel comfortable: “the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there.” In other words, to be “at home” somewhere does not always indicate that dwelling occurs, and therefore, we can surmise that Heidegger’s sense of dwelling is to signify something beyond simple comfort in a house or other edifice. These places may shelter or provide humans with a sense of place or purpose, but they do not amount to dwelling.

² Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. by Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Perennial Classics, Harper Collins, 2001) 143

They do, however, “serve man’s dwelling.” Heidegger clarifies that such buildings or activities contribute to the larger end of dwelling. The relationship between dwelling and building is that of ends and means: one builds in order to dwell. But, even though it would seem from this formulation that dwelling comes after building, as an effect, Heidegger reminds us that in order to build in the first place, we must already dwell: “to build is in itself already to dwell.” In other words, dwelling is ontologically prior to building; we must already understand what it is to dwell in order to build. Heidegger further explains this relationship through language. To build, in German, is “bauen,” and can be traced back to mean “to dwell” or “to remain, to stay in a place.”³ Heidegger moves further through language to discover the connection between “bauen” and the German verb “*sein*” (be), and so he asserts, “the way in which we humans *are* on the earth is...dwelling.”⁴ The activity of dwelling, then, constitutes a fundamental human experience.

Heidegger then introduces a new understanding of *bauen* which is “to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for.” From this, he distinguishes two types of building: constructing, which somewhat mirrors our everyday understanding of building in terms of a creation of sorts, and preserving, which is “not making anything,” but is “cultivating” or nurturing and caring for something. Both of these forms of building, Heidegger tells us, “are comprised within genuine building, that is, dwelling,” but he indicates that the latter understanding of building, preserving, has been covered over, and

³ Ibid., 144

⁴ Ibid., 145

encourages us to think further through the basic character of building as dwelling, an understanding which has fallen “into oblivion.”⁵

But what is it precisely to dwell? To interrogate this fundamental activity of “mortals on the earth,” Heidegger looks back to language. “To dwell” [*wohnen*] can be traced back to the Old Saxon term *wuon* and the Gothic *wunian*. Both of these terms, Heidegger tells us, mean, like *bauen*, “to stay in a place,” but another way of conceiving the Gothic term *wunian* is “to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain at peace.” Heidegger then connects this understanding of *wunian* as being at peace to the German word for peace, *Friede*, which is closely related to *frei* or “free” or “preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded.” Here, we could think of freeing someone from a trap, or freeing a bird from its cage. In this sense, Heidegger notes, to free is “to spare,” to let something go, and to keep it from harm.

There is, however, a more affirmative side of sparing. Heidegger says that “real sparing is something positive and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we ‘free’ it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace.”⁶ In this passage, we arrive at the “fundamental character” of dwelling: “to be set at peace” which means “to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature.”⁷ Heidegger asserts again that dwelling requires a certain kind of engagement, a caring for entities that allows them to come into the fullness of themselves, to exist peacefully as they are.

⁵ Ibid., 146

⁶ Ibid., 147

⁷ Ibid.

Dwelling, then, characterizes a particular kind of relationship and engagement, or “being-in-the-world,” which Heidegger describes in terms of a fourfold: situated “on the earth,” “under the sky,” “before the divinities” and “belonging to men’s being with one another” as mortals.⁸ Heidegger’s fourfold, though somewhat obscure, can be thought of as the human being’s unique situation. We are “on the earth” in that the natural world in which we live literally houses our existence. We are fed and kept healthy by its plants and animals, and sheltered by its trees and other material offerings. The earth exists as the ground, the foundation of our being alive. Yet we are also “under the sky” which Heidegger portrays as ever-changing, through “the year’s seasons” and “the light and dusk of day.”⁹ The sky and its patterns are, on the whole, unpredictable. As we are on the earth, longing for such foundation, we face the transitory nature of the sky and of our passing lives. Humans make their “home” or dwelling between the earth and sky, as neither a simple animal nor a heavenly body. While we may be able to describe and explain many things about the earth and the sky, its ultimate reasons and our reason for being remains a mystery to us.

This brings us to the other two elements of the fourfold, the divinities and our being with one another as mortals. Heidegger says that “out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into his concealment.”¹⁰ We watch for the gods in their presencing because we long for some measure, or gauge, for living; we long for a guide to the meaning of life, a source of direction in this “in-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 148

between” realm, between earth and sky. We measure ourselves, Heidegger tells us, by “upward-looking,” against the godheads, “before the divinities,” or the ideals of our culture. But even in our worship, our gods never become fully transparent; they “withdraw” into concealment and never fully reveal what we long for.

But why, given the sky’s transience and the divinities’ constant retreat do we continue our search? Why do we *care*? Heidegger relates this feeling or longing to our mortality: “To die means to be capable of death *as* death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities.”¹¹ While all living beings die in the sense that their bodies decay and their life ends, human beings are capable of confronting our own death as death, as the possibility of no longer being there. This realization, if we “dwell” with it, or “remain with it,” has the ability to shock us to the core. The disclosure of our potential impossibility reveals to us that what is at bottom is our ownmost possibility for being. Our being (in the way we are at present) is at stake for us in the capacity of death. Heidegger writes, “Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own nature—their being capable of death as death—into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death.”¹² In our realization of our own innermost nature, our being capable of death as death, and our most certain possibility, our way of being in the world and our possibilities become an issue for us. We realize that we are at stake, at risk. In our being in the world as mortals, we risk not being good enough, not being able to “measure up” to the standards we have for ourselves.¹³ Not

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Martin Heidegger. “...Poetically Man Dwells...” in *Poetry, Language, Thought.*, 219

“living up” to such standards or norms matters because we want a good and meaningful life, one that will bring us to a “good death.”

We must not forget, however, Heidegger’s reminder that the fourfold includes a “belonging to men’s being with one another.” What does our being have to do with our existence in a community with others? Here we must return to Heidegger’s questioning on the etymology of “building” and “dwelling.” In his connection of building [*bauen*] to dwelling [*wohnen*] or the dweller [*“gebur”*], Heidegger plays on the relations between the German word for neighbor [*Nachbar*], in Old English, *neahgebur*: “The Nachbar is the *Nachgebur*, the *Nachgebauer*, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby.” In our dwelling in the fourfold, we are never alone, but accompanied by neighbors, by those who are there with us in our mortality and longing for meaning.¹⁴ This means that one is never alone in his attempt to orient himself, to find a measure by which to live, but that one is always already in a communal setting which already has norms and standards for living.¹⁵

¹⁴ The relation between mortality and the neighbor is explored in an insightful way by Werner Marx in the chapter “Ethos and Mortality” in his book *Towards a Phenomenological Ethics* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992). Marx theorizes that, in confronting one’s own morality, one is singled out by death and feels utterly alone and without control over his own being. Such a confrontation reveals that the individual is not autonomous as he believes himself to be in the everyday mode of understanding or in the way that Heidegger describes as authentically “taking over being a ground,” but in complete neediness. In our experience of ourselves as mortal, we find a new way to understand the other, the neighbor, as someone to whom I must turn. While I find this reading compelling, Marx’s focus on the existential structures in early Heidegger and his willingness to boldly provide an ethics where Heidegger chose not to make using his interpretation (with all its accompanying objections) too far outside the scope of this thesis. See also Steven Crowell’s “Neighbors in Death,” *Research in Phenomenology* 27 (1997): 208-223

¹⁵ While my explanation may imply that these standards are created by us (an atheistic worldview), this is not necessarily the case in Heidegger’s philosophy. He would characterize the origin of such norms as a “sending” or “directive” which is neither entirely of gods nor of humans. The point is, the origins of the standards by which we live, particularly from the perspective of the individual, are entirely unclear, and yet this does nothing to diminish their power in our lives. This will be a recurrent theme throughout this thesis, and more explanation of this structure of our existence will take place in Chapter Three.

Dwelling in the fourfold, Heidegger then argues, is “not merely a staying on earth under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals.”¹⁶ But if dwelling is a particular way of being, a practice as I shall argue, how do we do it? We are provided with a few more clues from Heidegger. To dwell, he writes, involves “staying with things.” This may remind us of the more colloquial, everyday manner in which we talk about dwelling: we “dwell in our thoughts” or “dwell on the past.” When we dwell in this way, we stay with something, give it attention and allow it to be nearby. We let it linger, stay in our thoughts for awhile, and in the spirit of sparing, we do not interrupt its ways of being. Our relationship with an entity that we “stay with” is one of engagement, but not intrusion or manipulation. When we preserve the fourfold, ways of the earth and the sky, the divinities and the mortals, we let things be as they are “in their presencing” or as they are in such a way that embodies the critical interplay of the fourfold’s elements, thus revealing our way of being primordially “in-between” the earth, sky, divinities and mortals. To allow “presencing” means letting something present itself as it is, in its proper context, without imposing our will or own understanding of it upon it. Thus dwelling requires openness toward entities, and the desire to let them be themselves, as they are in their own nature.

Dwelling is not only achieved through staying with things in terms of cultivating them, but also through constructing things in the appropriate way, such that the things which are not already there, that “do not grow,” (on the earth, naturally), may also preserve and protect the fourfold in the ways mentioned above. Here we return to the

¹⁶ Heidegger, “Building,” 149

other understanding of building that we left behind: constructing. Building is dwelling only when we build a thing in such a way that it protects the fourfold, in that it allows for the unconcealment of the reciprocity of the fourfold's elements. Heidegger gives us the example of the bridge: "The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream...even where the bridge covers the stream, it holds its flow up to the sky by taking it for a moment under the vaulted gateway and then setting it free once more."¹⁷ Further, the bridge "always and ever differently...escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side."¹⁸ The bridge, a construction, gathers disparate elements together to reveal their meaning, the meaning of the earth (the river, the banks, the meadows all around it) and the sky (the "fickle" weather, the storm and sun), to us. The bridge brings all of these entities into an essential relation and establishes a meaningful place for mortals to dwell. Heidegger explains that the bridge does not simply exist in space, as abstract coordinates on a map, or as we might think of it if we were trying to calculate its properties, but it combines the world around in it in such a way that it exists as a location, as a place, only because it has meaningfully gathered the world, the fourfold, together. In other words, the bridge is a man-made construction which reveals a place for the presencing of earth, heaven, divinities and mortals. It arranges them in such a way that it reveals them as existing in a particular context that has meaning for the humans that dwell nearby.

Construction allows for an emplacement, a locating of a place for the presencing of the fourfold, or our way of being in the world. Heidegger notes that the construction

¹⁷ Heidegger, "Building," 150

¹⁸ Ibid.

of location, such as the bridge, “makes room for the fourfold in a double sense. The location admits the fourfold and it installs the fourfold.”¹⁹ In other words, construction simultaneously allows for a world and establishes a world (a world, a particular configuration or horizon of meaning, is both the cause and the effect of construction). It founds and joins our involvement with the earth and sky, and brings these relations together in a place, a “there.”

But, Heidegger is sure to remind us, this does not mean that mortal, human construction simply asserts itself onto the earth and sky, or uses up their resources in building bridges and houses anew simply from the dictates of the rational will, but rather, “building receives the directive for its erecting of locations” from its already dwelling in the fourfold.²⁰ Whereas the former action of self-assertion or “putting upon” would be what Heidegger calls “challenging-forth” [*herausfordern*], what he calls for in dwelling is a “bringing-forth” [*hervorbringen*], or a cultivation which allows for a self-showing, “the arising of something from out of itself.”²¹ To understand how building receives the directive from dwelling, we must return to the notion that the divinities serve as the measure for our being, and ask, how is it that we receive the directions, the standards for our ways of dwelling? In order to have some idea of how this happens, we must first understand that we precisely *do not* receive directions from the gods as Moses received the Decalogue from Abraham’s god. Rather, the directive comes from the interplay which always already exists within the fourfold, between mortals and gods, between earth

¹⁹ Ibid., 155

²⁰ Ibid., 156

²¹ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 10.

and sky. Thus we can already see that to receive the directive, or to become attuned to this interplay, requires that we practice mindful observation and patience with regard to what is revealed. Crucially, this also means that the meaning that is unconcealed between such forces is always at stake, or in question. The ways in which we may hope to receive these directives of our dwelling will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

Thus we can see that building is to be a response to the already-present dwelling in the fourfold, the sparing and safeguarding of our way of being in the world, which is already understood in our existence as dwellers in the in-between. In our building, we are to safeguard the fourfold by “bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things.”²² This means that building is to reveal our way of being as one which is in-between earth and sky, divinities and mortals, a situation which makes us always at stake in our actions, in communal setting with others, and ultimately unaware of the meaning of our being.

Heidegger finishes his essay with several recommendations: building and dwelling must become issues worthy of questioning or of thinking. He warns that we have not yet thought what dwelling means in “our precarious age” and suggests that mortals, or thinkers, must do their part to “bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature.”²³ While these requests are somewhat obscure in the essay, I believe they reveal the significance of dwelling to Heidegger’s lifelong project. But before we can think through their significance as well as how one may go about answering this call to “bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature,” it will be helpful to return to Young to see how she works with and against Heidegger’s notion of dwelling. In this way, we may “clear the ground”

²² Heidegger, “Building,” 149

²³ Ibid., 157-8.

for a new understanding of dwelling and its bearing on the feminist interpretations of the home.

2) Young's Account of Building and Preserving.

In her essay, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," Iris Marion Young explores Heidegger's concept of dwelling, particularly his division in the concept of "building" between construction and preservation, in an attempt to recover the positive values of the home for feminist thought. In her analysis, Young claims that Heidegger abandons an in-depth consideration of building as preservation and instead focuses on building as constructing. Heidegger, she says, "dwells on the heroic moment of place through creative activity" and in doing so, he privileges constructing and devalues preserving.²⁴ Constructing things, as we saw above in the example of the bridge, is how humans understand themselves in relation to the world, and it is therefore, Young claims, the activity in which we can see the emergence of subjectivity and agency. That construction reveals the way in which mortals make meaning out of their world is not a problem in itself, but Young does believe that it is of feminist concern since "on the whole, women do not build." Young surveys construction practices ("building houses and other structures" or "making building decisions" such as those that "corporate board of directors, architects, planners, engineers" make) both historically and currently, and concludes women's participation in these activities is negligible. If to construct edifices is to give meaning to our world, then women are not engaged in the activity of meaning-making. And if we accept that Heidegger privileges construction over preservation, and

²⁴ Young, "House and Home," 225.

believe that these practices are implicitly gendered, as Young asserts, then we may conclude that Heidegger privileges masculine activities over feminine ones.

While Young's arguments against Heidegger do address some of the more critical and practical issues of the lack of women engaging in housing construction, building projects and the important decisions to be made concerning public space, her interpretation of Heidegger's concept of building is limited, and thus her interpretation of his categories as gendered or biased is hasty if not wholly mistaken. In what follows, I will discuss the shortcomings of such a view, and then put forth a more positive, developed interpretation of Heidegger's concept of dwelling which I believe will be of more use and interest with regard to feminist concerns and aspirations.

The first problem with Young's reading is that it does not take seriously Heidegger's explanation of the relationship between building and dwelling, that is, that building is already founded upon and impossible without a prior state of dwelling: "for building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling—to build is in itself already to dwell."²⁵ Although, as we have seen, the relationship between building and dwelling is quite complex, it is clear that dwelling is the more primary practice in comparison with building: "only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build."²⁶ Constructing edifices or houses may make manifest our ways of dwelling on earth, but it is never thought to be primordial to our way of being in the way that dwelling is.

²⁵ Heidegger, "Building," 144

²⁶ Ibid., 157

Further, Heidegger makes it clear that preserving, as an activity which frees and safeguards, is the fundamental characteristic of dwelling.²⁷ Our dwelling depends on such preservative activity, and it is impossible in Heidegger's schema to extract preservation from construction or cultivation. When Heidegger asserts that we only build on the basis of already dwelling, he is claiming that we cannot construct something which establishes a world without already having *some* understanding of the various possible meanings that both the thing constructed and the things used to construct have. In other words, the construction of a world is a gathering-together of a variety of ideas about how we already live and understand our surroundings. We understand how to build the new thing, the constructed entity, by making reference to meaningful context in which it will exist.

Let us use the bridge again as an example. Mortals could not construct the bridge without already having in mind what the bridge would mean to them (to link two or more neighborhoods, to move goods across, to throw rocks into the river from the highest point for the best splash), and also what the river is and does, and how its banks may be joined together. Further, the different uses, manifestations and ways of constructing the bridge (where along the river, with what materials, etc) reveal the way in which what the bridge is and how it could be is always at stake in its construction, as it is in its cultivation or preservation as a bridge. The constructing of the bridge reveals that the meanings of the world in which people travel from bank to bank, communicate with other neighborhoods, live on the land and cultivate the fields, were already there in the first place. These latter understandings are preserved in the construction and are taken from the point of view of

²⁷ Ibid., 147 and see above p. 25

our culture, lifestyle and particular understandings about how things work (what Heidegger in his earlier works calls an *ontic* perspective). Through such actions, in the construction of the bridge, in creating it in a certain way, one preserves this pre-existing relational nexus of meaning. This is one way that preservation is implicit in construction.

But in this construction there is also a preservation of our dwelling at a deeper level, one which concerns itself with the meaning of being in general taken in the context of the fourfold (the *ontological* perspective). The mindfulness put into such construction, and the cultivation which follows, reveals to us how the question of the bridge, the meaning of its being, remains unanswered, that its meaning is always essentially undecided, or rather, is always being decided. As a product of human beings, who exist in a communal setting with norms which are always in the process of being developed, the bridge too, in its construction, is “at stake.” What it means for the bridge to be a bridge is an issue for us to decide upon and it means something to us as a part of our way of being in the world. Insofar as the building of the bridge makes our dwelling in the fourfold manifest in its construction, does building serve as preservation. While it would be imprudent to suggest here that, given this explanation, Heidegger privileges “preserving” over “constructing,” it certainly suffices to say that he places a great conceptual importance on the practice of preserving and that there is very little evidence to suggest that he devalues it or forgets it through a privileging of constructing.

Young, I believe, also restricts herself to a narrow understanding of “constructing.” While Heidegger does rely on examples and metaphors of bridges, houses and buildings, his explanation of what constructing entails is wide enough to

encompass a great range of activities, many of which women engage in more frequently than actual building projects. Heidegger mentions one such activity at the beginning of his essay: “the working woman...at the spinning mill.” If we look to the traditional chores of women, we will see many instances of construction: designing and sewing clothing and textiles, pottery and crafting household and kitchen tools, and even cooking all constitute ways of building meaningful things out of raw materials. While these objects, in particular the foodstuffs, may not be as durable as the log cabin or office building made of steel and glass, these constructions contribute to the manner in which we live our lives and the ways that we understand ourselves in a normative context with other mortals. If one wanted to argue that construction for Heidegger always involves a place-making, a claim for which there is some evidence, then we need only to look to the work of women in the garden and fields, in which they make a patch, or enclosed area, out of the soil and their labor, or to the interior design of the house, which women are known to decorate and furnish in order to make designated places for family activities and “dwelling.”

Somewhat ironically, Young elaborates on these activities—which I believe could be called constructive activities—in a section in her essay which she entitles “Homemaking.”²⁸ Here, she explains how women’s work in the home is not all devoted to the pure maintenance of life as Beauvoir describes it, but that many activities are creative. Making the distinction between “housework” and “homemaking” (a typical distinction of our time), Young describes how seemingly undifferentiated space in a house is transformed into a place or a meaningful location for its inhabitants. The

²⁸ Young, “House and Home,” 269

different rooms inside one's home become places not simply because things are in them—in the manner of a hotel room with comforts for the anonymous traveler or one's new house when he or she first moved in, with unpacked boxes stacked throughout the rooms at random—but only through the arrangement of certain meaningful objects. These objects are positioned to safeguard our way of being or dwelling in our home; “the arrangement of furniture in space provides pathways for habits—the reading lamp placed just here...the particular spices on the rack placed just so in relation to this person's taste and cooking habits.”²⁹ Like the bridge in Heidegger, one constructs her surroundings in the home so that they reveal the way she understands the world. Here Young is relying on the description of what Heidegger calls building in the constructive sense, but she does not seem to realize this explicitly. Moreover, Young is depending on her readers to associate such activities in the home, “home”-“making,” with women, as a feminine-gendered behavior. If such activities can be seen as constructive in Heidegger's sense, in that they establish a place and reveal “a nexus of relationships, a context,” then, within the terms of Young's interpretation of Heidegger, it would seem that women play a great role in the practices of building as constructing.³⁰

Although Young's appropriation of dwelling may be useful for addressing Beauvorian critiques of the home, the larger issue at play in all of these criticisms is that Young misses the multidimensionality of Heidegger's use of constructing and preserving, and therefore also of building and dwelling. While we can agree, based on evidence, that men literally construct homes more often than women, and that women maintain and

²⁹ Ibid., 270

³⁰ Ibid., 257

preserve those buildings more often than men, what is critical to Heidegger is how such activities receive their directive from our dwelling, thus preserving our way of already being in the world. We construct and preserve not only in accordance with cultural norms and traditions, but, more importantly, in such a way that makes manifest our dwelling in the fourfold, the ways in which our being, as mortals with one another, is at stake in what we do. It is in this realm, forgotten by Young, that one attempts to find the measure of our existence. And as we will see more fully in the next section, Heidegger finds that there are ways in which we build, namely through a “challenging-forth,” which forget this critical, ontological element of our dwelling.

While my own project is in debt to Young for her initial exploration of the use of dwelling for the feminist project, her misplaced criticism of Heidegger ultimately limits her venture by occluding the manner in which Heideggerian dwelling may address the deeper, more conceptual feminist criticisms of the home, such as the notion that home oppresses women and others through the longing for unity or stable identity. In the next section, I will examine the role that dwelling plays in Heidegger’s more critical project with regard to the history of philosophy and his “Question Concerning Technology” in an effort to put us in a better position to see how Heidegger’s full concept of dwelling pertains to our understanding of home.

3) The Forgetting of Being and the Fullness of Dwelling

In order to understand the larger significance and possible application of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling, we must pay closer attention to Heidegger’s hints in

“Building Dwelling Thinking” that “the real sense of *bauen*, namely dwelling, falls into oblivion.” What does it mean that dwelling has fallen into oblivion? How can it be that dwelling is the experience of human Being on earth, yet that “dwelling is not experienced as man’s being; dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of human being?”³¹

Heidegger invites speculation again, at the end of his essay, when he asks that we consider: “What if man’s homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight?”³² In order to understand the problem—this misunderstanding of dwelling as the essence of being, as “*the* plight,”—we must examine role dwelling plays in Heidegger’s more critical project on the question of being.

In “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger ties the problematic of “Building Dwelling Thinking” to his current meditation: “Man dwells as the ek-sisting one without yet being able to experience and take over this dwelling.”³³ Again we see the issue that humans dwell or are as ek-sisting, but are not able to grasp or understand their existence or experience as dwelling. But here Heidegger explicitly links the problem of dwelling to his larger project. He references Hölderlin’s elegy “Homecoming” and ties “homeland” not to nation or state, but to the history of Being. He writes, “The essence of the homeland, however, is also mentioned with the intention of thinking the homelessness of contemporary man from the essence of Being’s history.” According to Heidegger, our inability to experience building and dwelling *as* dwelling, or our misunderstanding of

³¹ Heidegger, “Building,” 146

³² Ibid., 159

³³ Martin Heidegger. “Letter on Humanism.” *Basic writings: from Being and time (1927) to The task of thinking (1964)*. Ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) 241.

what it means to dwell, our “homelessness,” comes from the “abandonment of Being by beings”:

Homelessness is the symptom of the oblivion of Being. Because of it the truth of Being remains unthought. The oblivion of Being makes itself known indirectly through the fact that man always observes and handles only beings. Even so, because man cannot avoid having some notion of Being, it is explained merely as what is “most general” and therefore as something that encompasses beings, or as a creation of the infinite being, or as the product of the finite subject.³⁴

One of the central projects of Heidegger's philosophy is to reveal the forgotten question of the meaning of Being. According to Heidegger, this question has been treated as the most obvious or self-evident by the history of philosophy, and therefore the question of being has not been themetized as such. Metaphysics has always operated with a "guiding thought" (such as Plato's Ideas, or Descartes' "cogito" or Nietzsche's "will to power") which provides an underlying interpretation of the Being of beings. In the history of metaphysics, the guiding thought, the fundamental thought with which a metaphysician begins his thinking, has treated Being as a being either by posting Being as an infinite being or as the creation of the subject. In doing so, they obscured the more originary question of the *relation* between beings and Being and replaced what would be an openness to Being with a more concrete foundation, which Heidegger, in every case classifies as a mistake of the ontic for the ontological. What goes hand-in-hand with the metaphysical interpretation of the Being of beings is an interpretation of truth which takes the form of “correspondence.” For Heidegger, the failure to go beyond the guiding question is revealed in the fact that the question of “truth,” the Truth of Being, has not

³⁴ Ibid., p. 242

been explicitly worked out. Thus Heidegger associates this oblivion of Being with metaphysics, where metaphysics is seen to be any attempt to answer the question of the Being of beings with the proposition of a foundation or ground in a being. Metaphysics, in seeking a foundation or ground for the Being of beings fails to dwell in the question; it fails to continue thinking the meaning and nature of Being and its situatedness in the interrelations of the fourfold.³⁵

One way of thinking about the relation of the oblivion of Being and the oblivion of dwelling is through a connection between building and metaphysics. The construction of metaphysical systems, such as those which arise from Plato's positing of the Ideas or Descartes' proposal of the *cogito*, is a kind of building that forgets or leaves behind preservative dwelling. It focuses on the active process of constructing, a positing of a worldview and system of meaning, and forgets entirely the manner in which building *belongs* to preservative dwelling, that we must already dwell if we are to build. In this way, metaphysics can be seen as a "challenging-forth," a force which suppresses the question of being, and so the nature of dwelling as preservation, rather than brings it forth.

Descartes illustrates this theme in the history of philosophy brilliantly when he describes his method through a building metaphor in his *Discourse on Method*. He begins:

We can see that buildings planned and carried out by one architect alone are usually more beautiful and better proportioned than those which many have tried

³⁵ I am deeply indebted to Steven Crowell and Vinod Acharya for remaining vigilant over my understanding and ability to communicate Heidegger's ontological distinction. That being said, if there is one hope I have for my future outside of philosophy, it is that I will never again have to clarify this distinction in writing.

to put in order and improve, making use of old walls which were built with other ends in view.³⁶

After extending this metaphor to the design and order of cities, states and political systems, in each instance finding success and efficiency in the products of a single mind or rule, Descartes extends this idea to his own ambitions in the grounding of the natural sciences:

I thought that I could not do better than endeavour once for all to sweep them [his school teachings] completely away, so that they might later on be replaced, either by others which were better, or by the same, when I had made them conform to the uniformity of a rational scheme. I firmly believed that in this way I should much better succeed in the conduct of my life...My design has never extended beyond trying to reform my own opinion and to build on a foundation which is entirely my own.³⁷

While questioning what was learned in one's youth is hardly dangerous to the practice of dwelling, the desire on Descartes' part to sweep away all that has been given to him from the past and from his culture in order to erect a new framework, built upon "a foundation which is entirely" his own, is one which denies the ways in we are irrevocably caught up in a world with others and with objects which already have normative value and exist within a complex set of interrelations. A similar disregard for the historical presencing and coalition of the past with the present is expressed by another "father of modernity," Francis Bacon, in *New Organon*: "it is idle to expect any great advancement in science from the superinducing and engrafting of new things upon old. We must begin anew

³⁶ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Edited by David Weissman. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 9

³⁷ Ibid. 10-11

from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress.”³⁸ Bacon, like Descartes, aims to clean the slate entirely in order that we may have sure and solid foundations upon which to base new science and technology. Here we see that at the basis of modernity’s revolution is the wish to be done with the past, to sever our way of being from its essential temporality, and thus from its dwelling in the fourfold, in order that progress may be achieved in the form of a stable interpretation of beings.

In line with Heidegger’s argument, we may say that the metaphysical thinking which poses foundations and purports to overcome and make redundant the question of Being is an abandonment of dwelling *as preservation*. In this manner, Young’s critique was on target: “it is time to pick up the threads of preservation” that have been forgotten due to a focus on construction. But unlike Young, I argue that this plan lies at the center of Heidegger’s lifelong project and therefore cannot be said to be “abandoned” or “devalued” by him.

Of particular interest to us here, as it will illuminate the connections between woman and the concept of the home in the next chapter, is Heidegger’s thesis on technology. In the “Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger links modern metaphysical thinking, which is continuous with the missions of Descartes and Bacon expressed above, with a particular way of viewing our relationships with others, objects in the world, and, frankly, everything under the sun. Technology’s way of revealing is that of “enframing” (*Gestell*), Heidegger’s term for the way in which we objectify others,

³⁸ Francis Bacon. *The New Organon, and Related Writings*. Trans. Fulton H. Anderson. (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960), 46, XXXI

ourselves, and our experiences in such a way that we make them usable for whatever purposes we desire whenever it is most convenient. When one wants to see in the darkness, after the sun has set, she turns on an electric lamp; when one wants to lose weight, she counts calories; and when one wants to feel connected to others, she updates her status or reads news feeds of her friends and family on social networks. Heidegger argues that the experience of these everyday things has shifted with modern technological thinking, where each experience and thing is quantifiable and “ready on demand.”³⁹ What this amounts to is everything being revealed, not as it is in its own nature, but as “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*): “Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e. challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve.”⁴⁰ In other words, what is most true for us in modernity is that all is revealed as “on stand-by.” Through this way of seeing the world and others, we place a demand on everything to answer to a pre-determined purpose, and ignore any notion that something must be “spared” or allowed to “let-be” in its own nature, on its own terms. In the technological mindset, everything is potentially transformable for our immediate or eventual use and disposal, and thus removed from its own context and ways of being.

The real problem with enframing—what Heidegger calls the “supreme danger”—is not necessarily that it reveals things in the world in a one-sided manner, as all revealing

³⁹ While one may not immediately think of these actions as quantifiable, or may not think of herself as caught up in this way of technology, when such processes break down—for example, the electricity goes down, and the internet does not work (and neither does the cell phone or Ipad, etc.)—we may see the existence of such an understanding of the world and our relationships in our feelings of estrangement and disorientation.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, “Question,” 20

of meaning necessarily conceals other possible meanings.⁴¹ Rather, the danger of technology is its way of concealing the possibility of other modes of revealing other than technological revealing. This happens because, as we realize that we ourselves may also become standing-reserve, we try to convince ourselves that this is impossible since we are the creators of such thinking; we are the “lords of the earth.” We attempt to will ourselves out of the mode of challenging-forth with another challenging-forth, a denial of our own nature. We purport ourselves to be “in charge” and in complete control of the way entities, and we ourselves, “presence” and in doing so, we deny our dwelling as mortals in the fourfold (a dwelling which is characterized by not being entirely in control and able to grasp completely the ways of nature, objects and human being). Our proposed solution to the problem of technology, that it turns us into standing-reserve, is essentially another kind of technological enframing. We frame our lives and activities in a way that denies our lack of control and understanding of the meaning of being which characterizes existence in the fourfold. This latter movement, Heidegger believes, is delusional and dangerous because in the frenzied activity to calculate and order all standing-reserve, it is impossible for us to encounter ourselves in our essence. In fact, in convincing ourselves that we can, and by continuing to understand ourselves, together and individually, as the subject standing over all objects, we keep ourselves from understanding the historical nature of enframing.⁴² In other words, in this challenging-forth of technology, we obscure the understanding that enframing is only one mode of revealing truth, historically grounded in modernity, amongst other possible modes.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 27

Thus the technological manner of revealing beings has the unique danger in that it closes off the human being, in her constant calculating, from the unconcealment of other modes of revealing, such as preservative dwelling. The regulation of all things by enframing has created a situation in which we have lost the ability to measure anything, even ourselves, as anything other than standing-reserve. As Heidegger concludes, “thus the challenging Enframing not only conceals a former way of revealing, bringing-forth, but it conceals revealing itself and with it That wherein unconcealment, i.e. truth, comes to pass.”⁴³

The question, then, for Heidegger, is, how do we come into the right kind of relation with beings? If we can properly describe the modern history of Being as a history of building without dwelling, then we must consider what it would mean to understand human beings as those who dwell. How would our understanding of our “home” change if we attempt to understand it in light of Heideggerian dwelling? In the following chapter, I will outline four major consequences entailed in a revival of dwelling as sparing and preserving, and explore how these qualities of dwelling are “brought forth” in our concept of home and into conversation with the feminist critiques of home we encountered in the first chapter.

⁴³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: The Practice of Dwelling and the Meaning of Home

The aim of this chapter is to explore a resignification of the home in light of Heidegger's concept of dwelling. In order to achieve this, we must identify the qualities or values put forth in the concept of dwelling that allow us to understand dwelling as a practice, a way for us to be in the world. In the first section of this chapter, I will elucidate four qualities, openness, provisionality, historicity and communality, which I believe constitute the practice of dwelling. These qualities will be described in a such way that they characterize not just the home as a site of dwelling, but what I believe to characterize all possible sites or manifestations of dwelling. With this better understanding of what it means to dwell in mind, we will then turn to our experience of the home, with particular attention to how it is characterized by the feminist critiques found in the first chapter, to explore how understanding the home as a practice of dwelling can reveal its manifold nature, beyond either a place of freedom or of oppression. This involves asking the questions, what would it mean for home to be a site of openness? For us to understand the "landscape of the heart" as provisional? For us to see that the home is invariably historical and communal? Here I will juxtapose my understanding of home as site of dwelling with the feminist critiques of the home, not in the attempt to show the home is actually a positive place of affirmation and freedom, as Young's critique has aimed to do, but to show that it partakes in certain existential structures in such a way that we may want to reconsider the desire to reject the home as some feminist interpretations have encouraged.

1) The Qualities of Dwelling as Practice

It is important to say at the outset that the qualities or characteristics of dwelling which I will detail below are mutually-implicative. For example, it is difficult to understand what it means to be historical, to practice preservative dwelling, without also understanding that such dwelling is also provisional, communal and open. These characteristics overlap and rely upon one another in more ways than I have been able to explicate below. Moreover, these qualities by no means exhaust or fully express what Heidegger means by dwelling, but together they constitute one way to recognize how dwelling speaks our multiplicitous views about the home and its complex place in our lives and collective imagination.

1.1) Openness

Dwelling is an openness, both in the sense of receptiveness and as a kind of vulnerability. Whereas the technological manner of revealing is a “challenging-forth,” a process which transforms all into discrete units or resources to be mobilized at will, dwelling as sparing and preserving requires a different kind of engagement, a “letting-be” and “bringing-forth” such that we allow an entity to remain “beforehand in its own nature.”¹ The openness of the dwelling practice is a responsibility not to dominate or “set-upon” in the way of modern technology but to be receptive to the way in which entities (including people) have multiple, even contradictory, modes of revealing and, thus, different ways of being meaningful in different contexts. We must not seek to reduce the meaning of these entities to simple objects which are only valuable insofar as

¹ Heidegger, “Building,” 147

they can be manipulated by the thinking subject to fulfill the wants and needs that it demands be filled. Such a reduction closes off the possible, thereby concealing meaningful modes of revealing.

Rather, in a relation which acknowledges both the ambiguity and the question-worthiness of our being in the fourfold, we must be content to stay with things, *including ourselves*, in their own presencing or self-showing as something which is at stake for us in our being in the world. The problem with metaphysical thinking is that it always begins constructing too soon, with an eagerness to have the question of Being settled once and for all. This kind of thinking seeks to evade the ever-present possibility of nonbeing, of death, by holding things still and closing the self and its possibilities off from its own nature. Dwelling, however, requires the opposite. Dwelling as preserving means clearing a path, allowing a way for the entity to show itself as it is in itself. Since our being can never be fully grounded or find its ultimate resting place, our dwelling as creatures of the “in-between” entails an openness that realizes both our vulnerability and receptivity to the ways in which our being (and as we shall see, our being-together) may be called into question.

Since the way we “are” in modernity shows up to us as standing-reserve, being open in dwelling means that we must question those ways of thought and practice which simply lock-in the meaning of entities, ourselves and others included, into discrete units or resources. Rather than relying upon ready-made answers provided by mindless chatter or the tradition of modern metaphysics, we must aim to remain open to entities in their

diverse modes of presentation and be receptive to the ties they have to communal and historical contexts that reach beyond technological thinking.

1.2) Provisionality

This openness entails another feature of dwelling: that it is provisional, process-like, and continually open for interpretation. Heidegger writes, “the real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell.”² As we have seen above with the quality of openness, in dwelling we seek to not cover-over the essential character of ourselves and the world around us: that we partake in the interrelated context of the fourfold, between foundation and transiency, mortality and ideological perfection. When we allow the things in the world, ourselves, objects, other people, to “presence,” to show themselves as they are, we must also realize that this showing is not necessarily singular, or a lone event which reveals the ultimate truth of the matter. The revealing of meaning is ongoing and multiple as it always exists *in the world*, a constantly dynamic context. It follows, then, that the question of how to understand the world and how to live, to make our home and make ourselves at home, is never settled, but operates always as a process in which one must constantly reevaluate where she is along the path.

The ways that we understand ourselves and others are fluid and shifting in both the lifetime of an individual and in the generations of a family or society. While one always attempts to discover a definitive way to live and to understand herself and her neighbors, society and nature, settling on a view in the hopes of fixing these entities

² Ibid., 159

denies our temporality and forgets that we essentially dwell “in-between” as mortals.

Our way of being is such that we are never able to completely take over ourselves as a foundation or ground in the way that we imagine objects or autonomous beings. Because to dwell is to come nearer to the Truth of Being, this primordial groundlessness, it follows that dwelling never finds its secure goal or end.

Further, it must be said, this process is neutral with regard to progress or development. Both progress and development assume an end goal, a fixed ideal to which we aspire. While we continually long for a sure guide to the good life, a way that we can ensure a peaceful death and an honorable legacy, we are bound as dwellers to, as Heidegger says, “await the divinities as divinities;” we never fully achieve certainty about the content of our ideals and about what it would mean to prepare for the good death.³ Without such knowledge (and to be without it is precisely what it means to be the beings that we are), it is illusory to plan or struggle for an end to the practice of dwelling. While for Bacon this means being trapped “forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress,” from the standpoint of Heideggerian dwelling, which realizes our unique human situation between the earth and sky, between a history outside our making and a death outside of our control, this is simply the way we are. While we may, at times, appear to be moving forward, beginning to better understand our own being and the way of the world, it is just as likely, if not inevitable, that we will also move backward, falling into what is known and given to us by the norms of our culture, and into our habits and the easier way of doing things. In our openness and desire to

³ Ibid., 148

recognize our dwelling, we must realize the need for vigilance and humility in order to “stay with” being and to the understanding that the real significance of our existence is a mystery to us.

1.3) Historicality

Inexorably connected to its provisionality, dwelling as preserving requires a particular understanding in relation to history and one’s self as it is set in history. We are set in history in two mutually-implicated ways: first, as beings who view the future in light of the past, and second, as beings who are born into a culture, a generation, a normative setting which already has, and is deeply involved in, its own understanding the world. Therefore, where and when we begin our thinking, our particular background, is critical in determining which paths we take.

We must acknowledge our own place in history. In particular for Heidegger, we must acknowledge our place in the history of Being, or the ways in which our own existence has been revealed to us. We have already seen that, according to Heidegger, we view ourselves in the manner of modernity and technology: I view myself as a subject looking at the object, and more importantly, I view others and myself as objects, as simple resources which can be fully grasped and activated when it is convenient or expedient. Our attempts to understand ourselves are always already caught up in a historical world, a pre-existent domain in which language and culture reflect our habits and ways of communicating with each other as well as our understanding of entities. Thus we see ourselves in a way already determined by a particular revelation or understanding of being, which is characteristic of a unique historical time period and

passed down to us in myriad ways. In order to see this in our own lives, we must be open to our past and question our own historical placement, the understandings of the world that we have learned from our parents, education and culture, as well as the ways that this positionality exists in the context of even larger histories. While we may already understand implicitly the history and development of our own culture, by remaining receptive to others, we may come to understand more explicitly our own historical placement and way of seeing the world, as well as to “unconceal” the alternate interpretations of history that have been, for the most part, covered-over.

Therefore, unlike Descartes and Bacon, we must try to not sever ourselves from those relationships entirely in the effort to make it easier to understand things, or to try to “get things right” once and for all. As Heidegger’s exploration of the etymology of the terms “building” and “technology” reveals, we are never entirely cut off from the historical ways of viewing things, of understanding our situation. While it is unclear whether we can take over past ways of dwelling—the earlier ways of revealing the world before the enframing of technology—such meditation on the past and our thorough-going historicity does reveal that we exist in a particular mode of dwelling; it reveals that the meaning of ourselves and the things in the world around us is an interpretive task. In our thoughtful dwelling, in our attempt to stay near things in their self-disclosure, we must question our own history and what we take to be given or already grounded.

1.4) Communal

Finally, explicitly stated in Heidegger’s description of the fourfold, yet most forgotten in modern metaphysics, is the quality of our dwelling which is “belonging to

men's being with one another.”⁴ The practice of dwelling entails an understanding that being, and questioning the meaning of being, is a communal, collaborative effort. The way in which we understand ourselves, our own history and language, never has the capacity, as Descartes imagines, of being “entirely my own.” As our historicity shows, we are always, in our ways of thinking and speaking, taking over norms and standards that are provided to us by a communal setting. While each of us, at least at the most individual level, has a particular history, the way that we work out how to live our lives, who we want to be, and what matters to us is a communicative, social process. While the motivation for our life's importance may come from the fact of one's own death—one's own confrontation with the possibility of impossibility—our fundamental communality does not allow one to work out how to live in isolation.

Moreover, this communal way of being in the world implies that we are always already in an ethical and political situation with competing histories, standards and norms. Not only do we have differing historical positions, different starting places, but we also have differing interpretations for how well one “measures up” to the norms that we share. This inescapable social setting makes us accountable to others, and further reveals how our dwelling is provisional and open.

“The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth is...dwelling,” writes Heidegger.⁵ If these qualities of dwelling are characteristic of the way we are, how can we come to see the home as manifestation of this dwelling, as a

⁴ Ibid., 147

⁵ Ibid., 145, his emphasis

place where we “learn to dwell” or *practice* our dwelling? In the following section, we will explore how the home, in both its material and social dimensions, can be viewed as a “site” of dwelling, as a something which allows for the unconcealment of our way of being open, provisional, historical and communal. With such an understanding of the home in mind, I believe we are in a better position to understand and take seriously both the feminist and traditional accounts of home.

2) Our Dwelling in Home: a Response to the Feminist Critiques of the Home

In first chapter, we saw the variety of ways in which feminists take issue with the concept of home as an ideal of comfort, security and selfhood. Simone de Beauvoir focused on woman’s state of immanence, brought about through relegation to the domestic sphere, characterized as it is by mindless and repetitive housework. Irigaray illustrated how it is not so much the actual work in the household that makes the home an enemy to women, but how the home is symbolic of men’s nostalgia for the warmth and security of the womb, a nostalgia which also leads to the denial of woman’s subjectivity, as well as the denial of man’s bodily nature. The more recent, post-colonial critiques, such as those by Reagon, Honig, Martin and Mohanty, asked us to consider how the concept of home is used as a way to silence difference and to protect ourselves from unsavory histories which may otherwise make a claim on our current projects.

While each critique has a different motivation and explanation for why the home is a force of oppression, all of them appear to take the traditional concept of home at face

value.⁶ In other words, the feminist critics do not necessarily advocate a resignification of the home, but, on the whole, appear to accept the romanticized idea that the home is always understood as secure, comfortable, and cut off from the harsh struggles of the outside world. With such a concept of home in mind, these critiques call for a rejection of home as a locus of positive values and promote instead the idea of displacement or a sort of “homelessness.” In what follows, I will bring these critiques, in turn, into conversation with a reevaluated concept of home, one which sees home not as cut-off from the world or necessarily comfortable and secure but rather as a manifestation of the practice of dwelling.

2.1) The Place of Home: Beauvoir, Transcendence and Immanence

Unlike the other feminist critiques we encountered in Chapter One, Beauvoir’s theorizing on the home centers almost entirely on what it means to be trapped within the confines and duties of the household, the actual space which many of us (at least in Western modernity) think of immediately when we think of “home.” To Beauvoir, the main offense of the home is the way it is used to keep woman in immanence, while men are free to explore more transcendent activities in the sphere of politics and society.

Given understanding of the practice of dwelling, and the idea that the home manifests this practice, there are at least two responses one may provide to Beauvoir’s account: one

⁶ This is said with the exception of Iris Marion Young who I do not classify with the feminists of the first chapter because she does not criticize or reject the home, but attempts, as we have seen in Chapter Two and shall see below, to reinstate it as a place of positive value. Also deserving special mention is Bonnie Honig who recognizes the need to “recast [the home] in coalitional terms as a differentiated site of necessary, nurturing, but also strategic, conflicted, and temporary alliances.” Honig, while recognizing this need, does little to carry out this reconceptualization in her own article, “Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home” *Social Research* 61, no. 3 (1994): 583 and Chapter One, 18-20.

which highlights how the “immanent” activities of the home may reveal our provisional, historical and communal nature, and one which questions Beauvoir’s categories with regard to the openness that entities, in this case, actions in the home, have when we understand them within the context of our dwelling. For the first response, let us go back to Young’s positive argument for preservation

Young’s account focuses on how certain domestic activities and practices, which Beauvoir would classify as immanent, are actually meaningful insofar as they preserve a person’s or a family’s particular way of being in the world. For example, dusting pictures and paintings need not be seen as a “battle against dust and dirt” but as a way of protecting the artwork that you bought because it made you feel the fullness of life at a particular moment, or because it reminded you of your lover. While such maintenance is repetitive, it is not necessarily base or worthless, as it preserves the significance or sway that the artwork has over one’s understanding of the “meaning of life” or her own way of living and loving. Our homes are often filled with such things, artwork or photographs, books and wardrobes, and even the house itself with its architectural structure and details, which “present” our way of being, and reveal our ways of seeing ourselves in the world.

In order for these things to continue to have such significance, they must be maintained or preserved. Contra Beauvoir, Young claims that preserving or “guard[ing] the things of the past and keep[ing] them in store” can be a creative and interpretative task: “the work of preservation entails not only keeping the physical objects of particular people intact, but renewing their meaning in their lives.”⁷ When one spackles the small

⁷ Young, “House and Home,” 274

cracks in the walls, she keeps alive the house that her grandfather built, and when one cooks, one celebrates the recipes of her mother, or the tastes of her childhood. These actions, no matter how durable or lasting in their materiality, reveal our human connections and represent a way to reveal the norms and tastes that hold meaning for us.

Rather than seeing all chores or activities of maintenance as vacuous and stagnating, Young explores how work in the home can be essential for meaning-making, for revealing the ways in which we understand ourselves and our past. These actions hold meaning for the way we presently live, as they contribute to how we understand ourselves in a particular historical position and to the ways we direct ourselves toward the future (desiring to live in an older house “with character” or to relish and share certain foods and avoid others). Preserving our things, cleaning and restoring them, then, can be seen as necessary to maintain this meaningful interpretation of oneself. The furniture and photos or the cast-iron skillet and the path to the door must be repaired, dusted, washed, or swept in order to preserve their guiding significance and their place in one’s life.

This, of course, does not mean that these objects and places will all be understood in the same way, and therefore it does not require that they all be as tidy and clean as Beauvoir’s housewife keeps them. “Preservation” here does not mean keeping all objects and relations in the home as unchanging as possible, as is the aim of a museum or library archive. Just as we are beings that are open and “at stake” in what we do, so is the manner in which we organize our home. We move furniture and re-paint the children’s bedrooms or redecorate the bathroom to reflect our new tastes and needs. Or maybe we remove the butter or add more spices to our grandmother’s recipes, revealing changing

diets or an openness to ways of cooking and eating which are not characteristic of our own culture. Such preservation, revealed here in the mode of construction, is like our being itself: open and provisional. If we are mindful about these practices of preservation, then we constantly evaluate the meaning and place of certain objects and activities, affirming or rejecting their significance in our lives. In other words, such preservation takes place within the context of life in all of its dynamism. While Young notes these acts are not “world-founding” or necessarily “transcendent” under Beauvoir’s rubric, they are necessary if we want to maintain a living history, or a connection with our past, which allows for the continued meaningful practices of a person, family, community or culture.

But given the way that such activities reveal the meaningful ways that we comport ourselves and understand our lives in light of certain values and standards, and do not simply or necessarily maintain the status quo as Beauvoir claims immanent activities to do, does it even make sense to classify these household chores (the typical labor of women) as “immanent,” when the political and progressive work (carried out by men outside the home) is classified as “transcendent?” Such a question brings us to a critical debate in Beauvoir and feminist scholarship concerning the legitimacy of Beauvoir’s dichotomy between transcendence and immanence.⁸

⁸ One of the most popular, now-classic critiques of Beauvoir’s interpretation of the home, and of women’s situation in general, is that her rigid distinction between immanence and transcendence cuts so precisely along traditional gender lines that it fails to recognize any value in women’s traditional work, ranging from “keeping house” to bearing and raising children, and thus continues to celebrate a masculinist ontology and ethics. Feminist critics of the transcendence/immanence dichotomy include Charlene Haddock Seigfried, “Gender Specific Values,” *The Philosophical Forum* XV (1984); Jean Leighton, *Simone de Beauvoir on Women* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh-Dickenson University Press, 1975); and more recently, in an essay which is more defense than critique, but which surveys these topics well, Andrea Veltman’s “Transcendence and Immanence in the Ethics of Simone de Beauvoir,” in *The Philosophy of Simone de*

With the acknowledgement that Beauvoir's concepts of immanence and transcendence are somewhat loose and multi-faceted, I do not wish to delve too deeply into this debate, but do I think that one important outcome of our understanding of the home as a practice of dwelling deserves highlighting: the breakdown of the distinction between "immanent" and "transcendent" activities (as Young has partially illustrated above). In other words, it is not simply that preservative dwelling turns our interpretation of some activities as "immanent" into activities which are actually "transcendent," but rather, dwelling shows us that we are always caught "in-between" transcendence and immanence and therefore, it is not so much a matter of *what* activities we do as *how* we understand ourselves in what we do.

For example, I could see myself dusting the books on the bookshelf or preparing a meal as "merely" continuing the cycles of biological life (the books will continue to collect dust and waste matter, and the food will be digested in a couple of hours; my hunger will return). Or I could see these same activities as a way of preserving my way of being in the world as one who dwells. The books must be maintained because they represent to me how I have been influenced by others' norms and values, or the way that I express myself tacitly to the guests at my dinner parties. Cooking a traditional meal and sharing it with others can be an act which not only preserves the past, but also reveals both my tastes and my feelings for the others who are also nourished physically and emotionally by it.⁹

Beauvoir: Critical Essays, ed. by Margaret A Simons (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁹ Although my examples have been mostly positive, I ask that the reader keep in mind that the home as a site and practice of dwelling does not necessarily 'presence' warm memories or sincere connections. The home may also, or alternatively, reveal itself as a place of violence or of painful histories or volatile

Where Beauvoir's typology of immanent and transcendent activities tends to rigidly define activities along temporal and social-political lines, with transcendent tasks being future-oriented and beneficial to the collective human race, and immanent tasks being past-oriented and futile, the understanding of home as a site of dwelling blurs these distinctions.¹⁰ The home where we preserve our things, creatively construct new places, and raise children, teaching them our views of others and our interpretation of the different norms that they should follow, can never simply be a place of the past or the maintenance of biological life. It is simultaneously an expression of our self, of how we contribute to others' lives and live out the norms and standards of our society, and how we orient ourselves towards the future.

As a manifestation of our dwelling, one which is historical, communal, provisional and open, the home and the activities that take place there are not the kinds of things which can be split into distinctive types, which attempt to "lock-in" certain characteristics about them as if they were objects capable of dissection and categorization. In other words, under an understanding of the home as a practice of dwelling, there is no simple way to decide *what* sorts of settings and activities are transcendent and immanent (good and bad for us). What we must do, in order to reveal the home as a practice of dwelling, is to receive our tasks, settings, and relations to others as entities which are capable of revealing how we dwell in-between past and future and within a historical and communal context.

relationships. I aim to show not necessarily the positive or negative value of home, but the way that it may be seen to exhibit certain existential structures which hold meaning in our lives.

¹⁰ These distinctions, we must remember, are also simultaneously normative evaluations which cut along gender lines in significant ways. See the texts cited note 8, pg. 61.

2.2) Objectification in and through the Home: Woman and Man as Standing-reserve

Nevertheless, the fact that many women do not freely choose to partake in these activities (in whatever sense this freedom is taken relative to men's) deserves our serious consideration. Since this aspect of her argument, in which Beauvoir identifies the woman as treated as "the Other" in relation to man, is most similar to Irigaray's critique that this "othering" sets up the woman as the home for man, I believe it is acceptable for us to address two lines of thinking concurrently through a juxtaposition of them with our understanding of the practice of dwelling. What we need to think about with regard to this objection, I believe, is the manner in which this particular social dimension of home reveals us as viewing ourselves and others not as dwellers, but as "standing-reserve."

2.2.1) "Woman" as standing-reserve¹¹

We can understand the enclosure in the homespace, or the relegation to the domestic sphere that Beauvoir and Irigaray describe as indicative of a particular interpretation of woman, or, in Heideggerian terms, a way of "unconcealing the truth of [their] being" as that of "standing-reserve." In other words, when we systematically assign women to a particular sphere, woman is revealed as a thing which has certain knowable characteristics: physically weak(er), emotionally open, caring, nurturing, more tied to nature and the body, etc.; we describe and explain the woman the way one would describe the qualities of an object, for example, a bouquet of tulips or a steam-engine.

¹¹ I put quotes around 'woman' and 'man' in the title of this section and the next because I do not want to convey that the arguments which follow are strictly gendered. In other words, I do not think that woman is the gender treated as an object, or that man is the gender which objectifies himself in the ways listed below, but that these are actions which any person could carry out under a certain mode of thinking, namely that of technological enframing.

And as a consequence of these characteristics, we deem woman as most useful and best suited for a particular set of tasks, in a particular setting: cleaning, cooking, taking care of children and the messes that they make, etc. the way we identify the tulips as best for decorating the living room or the steam-engine as most useful for transporting goods and people between point A and point B.

While the qualities listed above can be changed in whichever way best suits our particular culture and historical time period, it is important to realize that the content of these normative descriptions of woman is not the most critical issue. Rather, the problem with this way of revealing the nature of woman is that it treats her as having a pre-determined purpose, as something which we can reserve for certain jobs and dismiss for others. She is a human resource with definite characteristics and uses, or as Irigaray writes, an “envelope, a container, the starting point from which man limits his things.”¹² She contains a particular set of qualities and it is through this understanding of her that we determine her purpose and role in the home.

Such an understanding of woman denies that she is always an individual being, as one who is open and interpretive; as a being whose meaning is at stake in her dwelling. This does not mean that woman (or anyone) has infinite possibilities, as we are always set in a particular historical and communal setting that makes some possibilities unknown, unwanted, or unintelligible to us. Even in our re-evaluations of meaning, we always act in light of these normative settings. But it does imply that as a being who can make choices and decide which norms and values she wants to hold significance in her life, one

¹² Irigaray, *Ethics*, 10

which is always oriented towards her own mortality and can imagine or think about what dying a good death would mean to her, she has more possibilities and ways of being than can ever be defined in the way that such a technological enframing seeks to do.

When we view woman as an object with certain empirical qualities and uses, we do not adhere to the qualities of dwelling outlined above. Rather, we challenge-forth the nature of woman, turning her into a mere resource and then we demand that she fit the purposes and goals that we have set for her. We do not remain open to her own ways of presencing, but expect her to bend to our needs when and how we like them. If we were to think of dwelling as “the basic character of human being,” as Heidegger encourages us to do, then we might strive to be open to the nature of woman as dwelling in the fourfold. We would seek to safeguard this nature in its openness and provisionality, and try not to force her into pre-determined standards and particular roles.

2.2.2) “Man” as standing-reserve

But woman is not the only one who is treated as standing-reserve in Irigaray’s account of the longing for home. Man, too, views himself as something which can be “contained.” Irigaray describes man as longing for the womb, for a place where he is closed in and limited, a longing which we may interpret as representative of the desire to remove oneself from the “in-between” dimension and find a certain ground from which to take hold of himself. In *The Poetics of Space*, a treatise on spatial settings and the special place of the home, Bachelard writes, “without it [home], man would be a dispersed being.”¹³ Here we might see this understanding of home as something circumscribed, secure, and refuge-like as reflecting a desire on man’s part to demarcate

¹³ Bachelard, *Poetics*, 7

his being, to harness himself for particular purposes and distinct notions of life and ways of existing. With the idea of home, man attempts to ground himself, his being, in a particular being with neat lines and controllable qualities. He can fill the home with what he likes and only go out into the world, into the “great unknown” full of chaos and confrontation, when he wants. As Irigaray writes, “man is forever searching for, building, creating homes for himself everywhere: caves, huts, women, cities, language, concepts, theories, and so on.”¹⁴ Might we understand these attempts as the desire to escape the openness of dwelling? To deny the way in which our way of being makes us vulnerable to history and to others?

The problem with this way of revealing the home, those proposed in Bachelard and in the traditional view, is that man *is* a dispersed being. He is a being which dwells in-between the earth and sky and to whom the gods never fully reveal their secrets. He is a mortal, always running ahead of himself in anticipation of the future of his possibilities (of which the most certain is always his own death), and doing so in light of a past which he cannot control. He is in a setting in which he is constantly confronted by others’ evaluations of him and in which he creates himself in light of the others’ opinions, choices and actions.

In his search for containment, for a home from which he can establish a certain foundation, man objectifies woman and views himself, too, as standing-reserve. He wishes to be in a place where he is not accountable, where he is safe and where he can takeover himself completely. If we realize ourselves as the ones who dwell, however, such longings and attempts would come into question. Man would have to question

¹⁴ Ibid., 141

whether his nature is the kind of thing that can find such containment. In the revelation of his own being as dwelling, man would find that he cannot hope to be harnessed in this way, to be turned into an object which is capable of being encased and sheltered in the home. Moreover, in this questioning, he may come to see that the home itself is not the kind of thing which can keep his understanding of self entirely secure, nor can it stave off the chaos and conflict which he, in a modern mode of revealing, thinks to only characterize the world “outside.” Rather, he may realize that the home, too, is characteristic of his dwelling.

2.3) Later Feminist Critiques and the Home as a Practice of Dwelling

While much of the foregoing analysis is also applicable to the later feminist critiques of the home, such as those put forth by Bonnie Honig, Biddy Martin, and Chandra Mohanty, there remain aspects in need of clarification if we hope to reconcile these critiques with our understanding of home as a site of dwelling. For these thinkers, as for Irigaray, the home represents nostalgia for a place where one was whole; home represents a longing for harmony with others, for example as a family or cultural unit, as well as for harmony in the self, as a fully-coherent entity. This longing, they argue, often entails a withdrawal from the harsh realities and complexities of ethics and politics. Where relations in the “real world,” the world outside the home, demand compromises and the acknowledgement of shared historical settings, international interdependence, and cultural differences, the home is supposed to be the place where we can take refuge from

conflict and others' claims on us, where we can feel like we belong and that our sense of self is fully-integrated and secure.

Given these intuitions about the home, and the conceptual force they play in our ideas about political and ethical engagement, at the personal, national, and international level, these thinkers call for an abandonment of home. They find it too laden with signifiers which promote not difference, and therefore the need for coalition, but sameness, which leads to domination and violence. But what if it is possible to resignify and reframe the home such that it does not fall on one side of a binary, of sameness and difference, of private and public, or of self and other, but rather manifests the practice of dwelling "in-between?" In what follows, I will address the main tenets of the later-feminist critique of home and attempt to reconcile their concerns with our new understanding, which views the home as a site which reveals the dwelling's practices of openness, provisionality, historicity and communality.

One of the main arguments of the later critiques of the home is that it motivates withdrawal from social and political life. For Honig, our desire to "stay home" represents a disengagement and withdrawal from dilemmas, from the complicated issues and choices which we must face "elsewhere." In the home as a practice of dwelling, however, there is no privileged place of withdrawal; one is always implicated in an interrelational context which connects one to others in ways which are political and ethical, if not directly, then through the social nature of the objects in one's home. The furniture, whether passed down through the generations or bought at IKEA, reveals our way of being in alongside others in our dwelling. The kitchen table was made in your

great-grandfather's shop with wood sourced from protected forests, and the nightstand, of trendy, Swedish design, was made in a factory in Indonesia by an eleven-year-old child. While we can hope that most of the materials in our home do not tie us to actions which contradict the our own norms of acceptability, it is only through a lack of mindfulness to the way things "are in their nature" that we do not see our home as existing in and revelatory of the same communal settings from which we wish to withdraw. Simply having furniture, the table and the nightstand, connects us to interrelated and competing systems of norms and standards (your great-grandfather, in his socio-historical position, couldn't have cared less for concerns over green-house gases and conservation, and the child's parents didn't see anything wrong with sending their child to work since their community has encouraged it for hundreds of years). Rather than seeing certain ethical confrontations as unique or note-worthy, we must realize that they are everyday negotiations that arise from our being with others, and as such, cannot be escaped through retreat to the home.

Minnie Bruce Pratt recognizes this aspect of the home when she "stays with" the thought that the homeland on which she grew up in the American South was formerly inhabited by Native Americans who were forced off the territories, and later, cultivated by African slaves.¹⁵ As a site of dwelling, our experience of home can reveal to us how even the land on which we make our home has a history that is continuous with our present norms, standards and habits of interpretation. Pratt attempts think through this continuity by being open and mindful to the ways that this history still plays a role in her

¹⁵ Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity"

understanding of the world, how things are revealed, and what should and should not be in her hometown:

I was shaped by my relation to those buildings and to the people in the buildings, by ideas of who should be working on the Board of Education, of who should be in the bank handling money, of who should have the guns and the keys to the jail, of who should be in the jail; and I was shaped by what I didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets.¹⁶

By mindfully expanding the “narrow circle of the self” which she thought of as home, Pratt comes to see that the way things show up for her echo the racism and oppression of her homeland's history. And for Pratt, who strives to treat these others (whose land was taken, who worked the fields without pay, and who are always already recognized as belonging in jail or to the streets) in a way different from the ways of her fore-fathers, this history makes a claim on her beliefs and actions. Where in the modern view we believe it is possible to “sweep away” the past and the norms by which it operated, the home as a practice of dwelling reveals that we are always already operating in a historical and communal world which reveals to me how I should live and orient myself towards others. Again, while this history does not entirely determine me in my actions, it does provide a particular normative setting which I must act in light of when considering my possible ways of being in the future. As a site of dwelling, of our being in the world, the home does not represent a distinct place where we can turn ourselves away from the world, as if things *here* have been fully understood, settled, and decided for. Rather, the home can be seen as one of the central places in which we encounter the dilemmas and conflicting interpretations of things and their normative value.

¹⁶ Ibid., 17

This is seen more profoundly in the relationships that we have with others in the home. Where the traditional view describes home as a place of comfort and refuge, one might also think of the deadly fights between siblings for their mother's attention, of spouses that yell at each other for hours after one snide comment, or of the parent's desire (or decision) to slap his child for talking back. These commonplace occurrences do not reveal our security and withdrawal from ethical engagement, but rather the training ground for it. In the home, we are vulnerable to others' interpretations of us and their varying perceptions of the world, and we feel we must assert ourselves to reclaim our own understanding of what it means to be "myself." The practice of dwelling does not deny these assertions, but asks that we realize that home is a place of "in-between"—in between our understanding of ourselves and the claims made by others, both in our actual dealings with them and through the products of their design and labor.

The feminist critique also argues that such the traditional understanding of home as refuge motivates a desire to annihilate difference. If we believe in the ability to find refuge and a strong sense of belonging, and we instead find conflict and the struggle to be understood, we may attempt to eradicate those others who stand in our way. Within the home, this can take the form of domestic abuse, and within the homeland, as bigoted nationalism or civil war.¹⁷ The inability to accept the internal divisions which, in actuality, characterize our home or home country, may cause us to challenge home in its nature, enforcing a dream of unity onto a situation wrought with difference.

¹⁷ Just think of those who yell "Go home!" to immigrants, or suggest that they go back where they came from. The feeling expressed here is, roughly, "This is my home, where I belong and where you do not. You must belong somewhere, to your own home, but given how I see my own home, you are not supposed to be here with me."

But this is not the practice of dwelling. Understanding home as a practice of dwelling requires that we not challenge-forth entities, both other persons and our home, but be receptive to them in a way that reveals their own nature and context. We must attempt, if we are to bring dwelling to its fullness, to not turn others into objects which can be easily used and disposed of when needed. If we understand home in the first place as a site of openness and vulnerability, as a place in which the idea of self and a sense of belonging is always only provisional, then we may also come to see it as requiring compromises and coalition. Where Reagon opposes coalition to the home, I would argue that home as a site of dwelling embodies the meaning of coalition. The home is site of constant negotiations and difficult choices between others of different histories and beliefs. Parents must decide how to raise children, children must learn how to accept their parents and siblings, and partners must figure out how to live everyday with a each other, how to understand a person from a different history, situation, or even from a different culture and language than their own. Sometimes these differences may not be deep and complicated, but many times they are.

Martin and Mohanty characterize this need for coalition well when they describe it as “the product of work, of struggle; it is inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly reevaluated in relation to critical political priorities; and it is the product of interpretation...”¹⁸ As set in a historical and communal context, one in which we are always confronted with others who have their own particular history and their own set of ethical obligations to confront, “staying with” and “safeguarding” our dwelling is not an

¹⁸ Martin and Mohanty, “Feminist Politics,” 210

easy task. Our alliances with each other are constantly threatened by the need for convenience and made vulnerable to the easy interpretations passed down and lived out in our cultural settings. Our relationships with others, both those that are expressed explicitly and those which exist implicitly, must not be rushed in the attempts to settle matters once and for all, but should be understood as essentially provisional, open, and therefore unstable and interpretive.

Given that the practice of dwelling requires such openness and provisionality, the home reframed within the concept of dwelling does not represent the dream of the unified subject. Our understanding of ourselves is always extended outward into our possessions and into our relationships with others in such a way that we can never fully take hold of ourselves. While we still have a sense of agency, an ability to act, we must act in light of our historical and social context, and in light of these relations developed in and through the home. There is no place, not even the home environment, in which historical and ethical claims are not made on us; claims that ask us to recognize our embeddedness in an interrelational context and the lack of a fully coherent, fixed notion of self. Moreover, when we do act, we make choices with consequences that reach into the future, and are taken up in ways which are outside of our control. One may decide to forgive his brother for disappointing him, but such a decision does not end at the “moment of decision.” He must resolve to forgive, and preserve it through constant affirmation and action, and simultaneously must continuously attempt to “let be” the way in which his brother understands that forgiveness (particularly if it contradicts the forgiver’s own motivations). The home and its communality reflects our being in history, and thus

shows the self as fragmentary and consistently at stake, a matter of interpretation in light of cultural norms and historical situation.

But to be aware of this history, and to attempt to preserve our decisions and relationships in light of it, does not amount to nostalgia, a longing for the maternal womb, or for a place where we could fully annihilate threats to our integrity and be “complete.” Home as a practice of dwelling does not flee from the ambiguous state of our being with others, or from the pain and isolation of constantly having our own being at stake in our choices and relations. Rather, it attempts to take up this site as a manifestation of both our starting point, as well as the “open negativity” of the future.¹⁹ We acknowledge our history, not in a manner of romantic longing, but so that we may come to see the lack of completeness, the inability to go back to this illusory place of fulfillment and total belonging (for even the womb is not a place a peace, but of vulnerability as both mother and child handle complex negotiations for vital resources).

Where the traditional view of home is of a dream of fleeing this historical and communal setting of negotiation and sacrifice, and so is a dream of a situation lacking in responsibility, the notion of home as a practice of dwelling realizes that there is no such place or way of being that fulfills these longings. As beings in the fourfold, we must constantly face the manner in which we dwell with others, in history, and therefore, we cannot reasonably hope for a place or a way to annul all difference in order to be complete.

¹⁹ Young, “House and Home,” 275. Young describes her theory of preservation in the home as a “remembrance” as opposed to “nostalgia.”

CHAPTER 4: Home and Homelessness: Dwelling in the Tradition

The traditional view of the home that we saw in the first chapter—the home understood as comfortable, as refuge-like, as a place where one felt truly centered and most like oneself—may seem entirely lost in our understanding of home as a practice of dwelling. In other words, how is it possible, one might ask, to understand the home in a way that takes this traditional understanding of home, as secure, comfortable, and intimately tied with our experience of self, into account? Given the foregoing analysis, one might wonder, how is the home as a site of dwelling different from the “homelessness” promoted by some of its later feminist critics? In this chapter, I will explore these questions in the attempt to realize the ways in which we can reconcile the home as a practice of dwelling with the traditional understanding. While of some of the rosier, nostalgic visions of home in the traditional view are forsaken, we will come to see that such a resignification of the home has the conceptual strength to account for our feelings of self and centeredness put forth in its traditional conception

1) Dwelling in the Home and Homelessness

Let us begin, once again, by comparison. In order to see that the traditional understanding we had of the home is not entirely lost and that the understanding of home put forth in Chapter Three is not simply homelessness, let us go back to some of the

proposals by feminist critics of the home and those who wish to de-stabilize the longing for home and stable subjectivity.¹

1.1) Dislocation, Nomadism and the Modern View

In her commentary on Martin and Mohanty's article on the feminist politics of the home, Teresa de Lauretis tells the reader that a new politic must "not merely expand or reconfigure previous discursive boundaries" but that one "has to dis-locate itself, to dis-identify" with itself.² When confronted with old assumptions and histories which do not properly convey the site of home or the nature of the subject, Lauretis advocates a dislocation and theoretical homelessness. She writes, "the shift [from home to homelessness] entails, in my opinion, a dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is home—physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically—for another place that is unknown and risky..."³ Such a call for homelessness and danger mimics other postmodernist and postcolonialist discourses on "exile" and "nomadism," where the subject is to give up the idea of home and be prepared, as Reagon puts it, for "conflict" and "danger," to be in a place of difference,

¹ It is important to point out that, while most of the later feminist theorists considered in the first chapter (Reagon, Honig, Martin, Mohanty, Pratt and de Lauretis) do promote disengagement with the concept of home, a refusal of it or a call for homelessness, their solutions and conceptualizations of what such a refusal and homelessness would entail are varied. For the sake of argument, as well as to address the more widespread themes and proposals that have been taken up in feminist, postmodernist and postcolonialist thought, I will appeal to the more extreme versions of these arguments, supplementing them with what I believe to be complementary proposals.

² Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects," 138

³ Ibid.

lacking in both comfort and solidarity.⁴ One is asked to de-center herself and think at and beyond the borders or margins of modern notions of the home and politics.

One of the more popular philosophical accounts which may be seen as a valorization of homelessness is that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari propose the notion of “nomad thought,” a kind of deterritorialization and dis-orientation of the subject, the one who finds herself at home, mired in institutions and practices not of her making.⁵ Deleuze and Guattari liken the postmodern subject, one who has challenged the modern norms and practices of language and thought, to the nomad, the “gypsy” and the “immigrant.”⁶ Under such an understanding, the subject is seen to be constantly mobile, in flux, and unbounded. Such discourses on homelessness romanticize nomad cultures, as if the nomad is the one who truly exists without a home or orientation to stifle his thought and ways of understanding the world. Such a subject always exists at the margins and may feel free to escape, to follow the “lines of flight” to alternative and subversive conceptualizations of entities, whenever necessary.

But as dwellers, as those who wish to realize our way of being as open and provisional, *but also* communal and historical, we must question the legitimacy of such proposals. Namely, we must ask how this call for nomadism and dislocation, this escape *from* the “safe” place of home, construed in its traditional form, repeats and reinstates

⁴ Reagon, “Coalition Politics,” 358

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 18-19, quoted from Caren Kaplan’s *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 87.

some of the same longings that motivated the retreat *to* home that we saw in Chapter One and Three. In other words, how might we see that such a structure of theoretical homelessness and absolute mobility represents the subject's longings for a new beginning, a liberation from the ties to others, and from a history and a communal setting which inevitably demands accountability and engagement? Such calls for dis-location can easily be seen as motivated by the desire to escape one's past and for the freedom of being entirely rootless and disconnected from those who make claims on her and demand that she be held responsible for her choices and actions in a pre-existent, social setting.

The appropriation of homelessness in postmodern discourses may be interpreted, then, as turning what is "other" (another land, place, or identity) into a kind of "dream home," a place where one can play, revel in adventures and subversions, and in particular for the above theorists, where one can avoid the entrapment of everyday, modern modes of thinking. Heidegger, writing in the wake of Nietzsche and the interpretations of his "wandering" philosophy, noted that "the figure of the adventurer is possible only in the historical space of modernity and modern 'subjectivity'."⁷ In other words, the adventurer, the nomad or the gypsy figure, as enacted by Western subjects, seeks to reestablish the modern man's capacity to be independent and unbound, outside of time and social obligations. Just as Descartes sought to build upon thoughts which were "entirely [his] own," the nomad seeks to avoid our modern history by placing himself outside it, in a free sphere of solitude and self-sufficiency. As Caren Kaplan puts this concern: "when Deleuze and Guattari pose a 'nomadology' against 'history' they evince

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "Andenken,"* 178-80, quoted from Fred R Dallmayr's *The Other Heidegger*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 156

nostalgia for a space and subject outside Western modernity, apart from all chronology and totalization.”⁸

Such desires or quests for homelessness and dislocation from oneself and one’s social-historical setting are not characteristic of dwelling, but rather the inverse of it. Heidegger, in his lecture on Hölderlin’s poem “The Ister” describes the kind of homelessness outlined above as that of an “adventurer” or an aimless wanderer, who wishes romantically to embrace “wilderness” and “[become] acquainted with everything.”⁹ While this itinerancy may give us the feeling of freedom and excitement, Heidegger warns that the escape from the world, from one’s past and the others with whom she shared it, ultimately amounts to “nothing” since “no skillfulness, no acts of power, and no artfulness can stave off death.”¹⁰ As with the nostalgic longing for the womb, the desire to leave the home permanently, to become “homeless” reveals a longing to be not only outside of our own history or cultural setting, but also to deny our finitude and the way in which we must take responsibility for our actions in light of an ever impending death. Where the modernist, traditional account of home seeks to take hold of the earth, to find a sure ground and foundation, the nomadic postmodern account of homelessness flees to the sky, to become lost in transience and nonidentity.

The performance of theoretical homelessness is not the same as the home of dwelling, most clearly because such thinking only repeats the dream of an absolute self, one which can escape his essential finitude and historical placement in the dimension

⁸ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 89

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Der Ister,” quoted from Fred R Dallmayr’s *The Other Heidegger*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 156.

¹⁰ Ibid.

between earth and sky. From the standpoint of the home as a practice of dwelling, we can see that homelessness and deterritorialization represents a challenging of the human being's nature rather than a preservation of it. It represents the dream of placelessness and worldnessness; a way of eradicating our worldly obligations to others and the claims which our historical placement makes on us.

1.2) Coming Home to the Self

The home as a site of dwelling cannot be understood as this homelessness. While it may ostensibly share many of the same qualities as the account of dislocation above, such as openness, instability, provisionality and the encounter with difference, there are important distinctions to take into account. Where the home of dwelling does encourage us to embrace our way of being with others, and therefore to confront one another's differing norms and historical positions, it does not encourage us to become lost in otherness or to seek estrangement from our own history. In his lecture on a different Hölderlin poem, "Remembrance," Heidegger explains that the understanding of communality and being with others (which I have characterized as belonging to the home as a site of dwelling) necessitates that one enters "into confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with otherness or the alien," not in order to "get lost in the strangeness" but to "ready itself there for its own tasks."¹¹ In other words, one does not encounter the other (in other lands, cultures, persons, or even genders) in order to find ways of sacrificing herself or shedding unsavory histories and rigid or disagreeable

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne "Andenken,"* 123, quoted from Fred R Dallmayr's *The Other Heidegger*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 156

normative settings. Rather, this encounter, understood from the perspective of the practice of dwelling, occurs precisely so that one may discover herself; to be put in a proper relation to herself in such a way that she may recognize her existence in her particular historical and communal setting.

When the dweller encounters the foreign, whether it be in a conversation with someone from another land or with her neighbor whom she hasn't spoken with since she left her parents' house, she practices openness and reticence, attempting to understand the other in her way of being: what she believes, how she sees the world, what she thinks she should do next, etc. In doing so, the dweller recognizes her own reference point, and how they may be similar or different. In this encounter lies the possibility of seeing how invariably connected, yet also incomparable we are with those around us. For the dweller, this confrontation with the other is the "first reflective glimpse of self-being."¹² This opens us up to our own way of being in a multidimensional way. While we first notice our ontic differences most clearly, the ways in which our origins, conceptual and actual homes differ, our interactions with the other reveals a basic, ontological structure as well, that we are together with this other, linked to them in myriad ways which are beyond our control, yet nevertheless determines us in our being. For example, I may notice (for the first time or *as if* for the first time) that my neighbor is of a different race, class and educational level than I am, and how this causes her to have more choices on some issues, and less on others. But I could also see that she faces dilemmas and difficult negotiations in the similar ways I do, despite their different content, and that she is influenced by her history and cultural norms in a similar way that I am influenced by

¹² Ibid., 178-80

mine. We share these basic qualities at a deeper level, and through an experience or interaction with her, I learn about my own situation.

We “ready” ourselves for our own tasks by taking such ontic differences and ontological similarities into account when we think about our own way of being. The home serves as this site since it is a place of sameness and difference, familiarity and foreignness. What is different about the home, however, from other places where dwelling may occur, is that the home-place serves as our reference point, a guidepost in all of our other encounters. It has priority in our understanding and serves as the original orientation from which we are able to encounter difference. It is the place from which we begin our discovery of self, and the place which we carry with us in the ever-provisional process of becoming a self.

While the home may appear fixed in the face of otherness, in the moment of difference, as a site of dwelling, we must realize that it is not essentially so. From the moment we come into being, we encounter conflict with the non-self, with the mother, or the siblings, with new objects and ideas which will later become integrated into our understanding of self. As we saw in Chapter Three, section two, in the home we are surrounded by entities (grandfather’s furniture, mother’s recipes, jealous brothers) which reflect both otherness and possibilities for the self. The home is the place where we take up the task of becoming who we are by accepting or rejecting these things as “me” or “mine” and then using them to express our beliefs about the world and the way one should be in it.

This home, the site of dwelling which is multidimensional, interrelational and historical, is unique because no one can be without one. While we cannot grasp it in the sense of an empirical possession, just as we cannot grasp ourselves in this manner, it is impossible to ever really be “homeless” in this sense because each of us has a position from which they begin their being in the world. This does not necessitate that the home, the one we carry with us as a reference point, be identical to the place where we were born or raised, although for many this home still holds the most salience. We must remember that as a site of human dwelling, it is a place which constantly undergoes re-interpretation, a constant re-territorialization. I decide to affirm the aspects of the home which make sense to me, that fit with my values and relative grasp of things, and I let go of those things which no longer hold their former significance. In this sense, the home serves as my “self-center,” and reveals how I understand myself in the world.

2) Security, Comfort, and Retreat

While we may feel security and comfort in the thought of home, or in our actual, physical home, as it seems at present to be the most familiar, we must understand that these features are not the defining features of home; they are not the home’s fundamental characteristics. While I may feel a relative sense of security and belonging, particularly in my encounter with otherness and what feels foreign, to attribute these feelings to the home as if they were essential qualities of any “home” is to cover up the way in which the home had its own conflicts, and continues to have an unstable meaning and place in my life. On one occasion the home can be the place where we feel the most

love and joy with family members, comfortable and stable in our relationships. On another, it is a place of loss and betrayal, and reveals us in the midst of deep anxiety about the past and future.

As we have seen in Chapter Three, the feeling of unity and wholeness, or of retreat and withdrawal in the home are illusory. As a manifestation of dwelling, the home mirrors our way of being in the world of historical and communal connections consistently stretch beyond us and which inevitably present ethical confrontations. Therefore, while we may also feel at times that the home is a place of retreat or a “safe haven” we must be wary of turning this feeling into an essential characteristic of the home, lest, as the feminist critiques have shown, we turn those others in and around the home into standing-reserve such that we can avoid the difficulties of conflict and coalition.

In this sense, we must reject certain aspects of the traditional view, one which characterizes the home in mostly positive terms. While the home may be for some, at certain times, a place of warmth and comfort, it is also always a potential place of hostility and distress. The foregoing analysis has not sought to reveal the home as fitting within particular normative structures, or of being disclosed as positive or negative, but has attempted to show how the home, as a place inhabited by human beings, designates a place of dwelling, where “humans undertake their journey on earth under the sky from birth until death.”¹³

¹³Heidegger, “Building,” 145

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